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THE VALLEY  
OF ARNO

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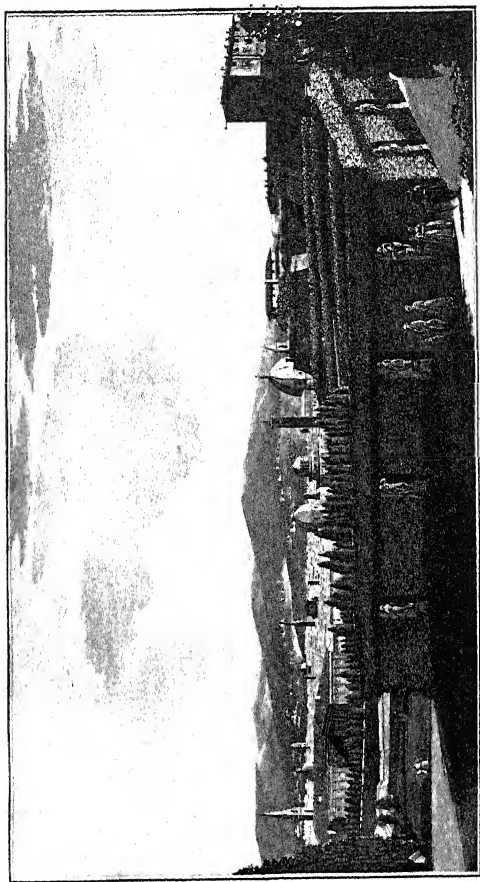
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*Florence from the Boboli Gardens*

THE  
VALLEY OF ARNO

A STUDY OF ITS GEOGRAPHY

HISTORY & WORKS

OF ART

BY

EDWARD HUTTON

*With 32 Illustrations from old prints  
in the possession of the Author*



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TO MY FRIEND  
REGINALD TURNER  
THIS BOOK ABOUT HIS HOME





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# THE VALLEY OF ARNO

## I

### VAL D'ARNO

**I**T WOULD BE HARD TO DEFINE ARNO BETTER than Dante has done in the lines:

Un fiumicel che nasce in Falterona,  
E cento miglia di corso nol sazia.

The greatest river of Tuscany, and, save for the Tiber, the greatest of Central Italy, Arno rises upon the southern slope of Monte Falterona, some 4,265 feet above the sea, in one of the loftiest groups of the Tuscan Apennines, where they finally turn southward down the long peninsula of Italy. From its sources it runs due south for about thirty miles, till, within a few miles of Arezzo, and the Val di Chiana, it turns suddenly north-west and pursues this direction for about another thirty miles, as far as Pontassieve, where it again makes a sudden turn, and thence proceeds as nearly as possible due west for some sixty miles to the Tyrrhene sea. The Arno thus streams right across the peninsula westward from the Apennines to the sea, and from Arezzo, where it first turns westward, to

its mouth, it offers a considerable obstacle, at first, between Arezzo and Florence, by the depth and steepness of its valley, and below Florence by the width of its marshes and the volume of its waters, to any passage northward or southward across Etruria. Its course, indeed, is decisive in the history and development of Etruria and Tuscany, and upon examination affords one of the most interesting examples of the effect of geography upon history to be found in the peninsula.

A study of the map will show us that the Arno, rising high up on the southern and western slopes of the Apennines, though it first runs due south for some thirty miles, presently turns north-westward, and so runs to the sea parallel with the main range of the Apennine which stands south-east and north-west across the peninsula and divides Tuscany from the Lombard plain. Indeed, the Apennines, in that part of their course, are the watershed between the valley of the Po and the Val d'Arno. And this in a sense is crucial; for the Arno waters the only considerable plain to the south of these mountains, a plain that in its smaller and far more various way corresponds exactly to the great Cisalpine plain to the north, which the Romans called Cisalpine Gaul, and we Lombardy and Emilia. What the Po is to the Lombard plain, the Arno is to the Tuscan, the real difference lying not in the vastness of the northern plain and river in comparison with the southern, but fundamentally in their directions; the Po flows and the Lombard

plain opens into the Adriatic; the Arno and the Tuscan plain into the Tyrrhene sea.

It will be part of our business to note the effect of this upon the Val d'Arno and to explain why, if our large analogy between the Lombard and the Tuscan plains be a true one, Pisa never had the opportunity of the career of Venice, and why and how Florence came to have the capital importance in the Val d'Arno that she had.

Such then, as I hope to show, is largely the character of the great Tuscan valley, its most fundamental divisions being those three I have named; first, the thirty miles from the source on Falterona to near Arezzo, where the river runs southward; second, the thirty miles from Arezzo to Pontassieve, where it runs north-west and, last, the sixty miles from Pontassieve to the sea, where Arno passes westward straight to the Mediterranean.

In considering the Val d'Arno in its relation to Tuscany these are the true divisions, the fundamental parts of the river, and the end of each one of them may roughly be said to be marked by one of the three cities Arno boasts, Arezzo, Florence, Pisa; but in any consideration of the valley and the river in and for themselves others at once appear. The Arno is, indeed, divided into six main basins, each of which is closed and held by a narrow gorge or pass. These basins are: The Casentino, the Val d'Arno Aretino, the Val d'Arno Superiore, the Val d'Arno Fiorentino, the Val d'Arno



Inferiore, and the Val d'Arno Pisano. Let us consider these.

The Casentino, the highest valley of the Arno, may be said to run from the sources of the river upon the flank of Falterona to the Stretto di S. Mamante, some seven miles below Bibbiena. The Arno has there all the character of a mountain stream receiving many a tributary from the steep and wooded hills that close in the valley east and west. Even in hell one remembered and longed for the refreshment of this mountain vale:

Li ruscelletti, che de' verdi colli  
Del Casentin discendon, giuso in Arno,  
Faccendo i lor canali e freddi e molli. . .

Below the Stretto di S. Mamante, a narrow gorge, a little more than two miles in length, the valley opens little by little into the Val d'Arno Aretino, about five miles north of Arezzo, from which city, as Dante says, the river *torcere disdegnoso il muso*, the Arno begins to turn westward till it enters the Stretto dell' Imbuto.

Beyond this pass the Val d'Arno Superiore runs north-west through the Valle dell' Inferno as far as the pass of the Incisa. This is a long gorge of just over nine miles between Incisa and Pontassieve, where the river turns westward and enters the Val d'Arno Fiorentino.

The Val d'Arno Fiorentino, which stretches from the exit of the Incisa at Pontassieve to the entrance of the Gonfolina at Signa, a distance of

not less than twenty-one miles, is divided into two parts, *Superiore* and *Inferiore*, not merely by Florence, though that city, indeed, marks the limits of each, but by the pass in which the city lies.<sup>1</sup> The Val d'Arno Fiorentino Superiore consists of a valley ever widening westward till immediately below Florence it opens suddenly into the great Florentine plain. The Val d'Arno Fiorentino Inferiore lies wholly in this great plain, which the river divides into two unequal parts, that to the south being the smaller, not much more than two miles wide at its widest, while that to the north stretches away to Pistoja.

The pass, if pass it can be called<sup>1</sup> in which Florence lies, is the most important of the Arno. Next to it in importance is the Stretto di Gonfolina—lying between the hills of Artimino and Malmantile—which closes the Val d'Arno Fiorentino upon the west. There for about nine miles the river runs between the precipitous hills till at Montelupo it comes into the great plain of Empoli and the Val d'Arno Inferiore.

Across this plain the river winds, for the most part under the hills to the north, till at Pontedera the Monte di S. Miniato on the south and the Colline delle Cerbaje on the north close in upon the valley, forming a pass through which the river flows into the Val d'Arno Pisano, the sixth and last basin of the river. But this too should be divided into two parts, like the Val d'Arno

<sup>1</sup> See *infra*, p. 160.

Fiorentino; that above the city of Pisa being the true Val d'Arno Pisano, that below, the sea reach.

Now each of these six natural divisions or basins of the Arno has not only its own character in scenery and so forth, but its own secret and importance in the history of the river and the strategy of the valley and of those three cities which so unequally strove for the mastery, which, rightly understood, the valley alone could give.

The Casentino itself was not, as its name *Clusentinum* implies, quite a closed valley, a veritable *cul-de-sac*, but it was without easy outlet and therefore without essential importance. A track over the Apennines by the Passo dei Mandrioli seems always to have been in use here between Tuscany and Romagna, and was not unknown to the Romans. This road, still of some small value, runs north-east from Bibbiena and strikes the great Roman road across Cisalpine Gaul, the Via Emilia, at Cesena. It was and is thus the southernmost entrance from that road into Tuscany.

But the true value of this road does not appear with regard to Tuscany. It is true that a road still in daily use climbed from Bibbiena north-westward round the northern base of the Pratomagno, the great headland or peninsula of mountain about which the Arno makes its great bend. But a man wishing to reach the Val d'Arno Fiorentino from the Via Emilia would not come thus across the Passo dei Mandrioli into the Casentino and make his way by the difficult road from Bibbiena to

Pontassieve, he would cross the Apennines by the Futa and come directly to Florence. The value of the Passo dei Mandrioli and of the Casentino only becomes clear when the true character of Arezzo has been grasped.

The geographical position of Arezzo is of exceptional interest. To begin with, Arezzo stands just outside the Arno valley, to the south of and outside the great angle the river makes when, having come thirty miles due south from Falterona, it suddenly turns north-west, about the headland of the Pratomagno. It thus commands two major reaches of the river where they meet. But there is more than this. Arezzo not only stands just outside the Val d'Arno, and that at a crucial point, but it occupies an almost similar position with regard to the wide and enormous vale running due south, the Val di Chiana, the natural road into the heart of Italy, the lower Tiber valley, the way to Rome. Nor is this all; for since the valley of the Tiber runs parallel with the Casentino, the Tiber rising in the same latitude as the Arno, and continues southward for many miles parallel with the Val di Chiana, Arezzo lying where she did commanded absolutely not only the solitary passage from the Val d'Arno to the Val di Tevere, but the northern pass from the Val di Chiana into that valley, which itself held all the great passes of the central Apennines. Indeed, Arezzo would seem to have been ordained by nature as the great capital of this part of Italy and as incomparably the most important

city of the Val d'Arno. This is how the Romans regarded her, Livy naming her among the *capita Etruriæ populorum*, while in the Roman military system she played a great part and was regarded as of the highest importance since she commanded the western entrance into Etruria and the valley of the Tiber, from Cisalpine Gaul. This view is endorsed by everything the Romans did in this part of Italy. Arezzo was the head and terminus of the Via Cassia till after the Second Punic War. It was at Arezzo that Flaminius was encamped with his army to oppose the advance of Hannibal when he crossed the Apennine to advance on Rome; it was from the camp at Arezzo that he issued out, to be hopelessly beaten at Trasimene. And then, immediately the war was over, it was from Arezzo the Romans thrust forth their new road, a continuation of the Via Cassia across the Apennine into Cisalpine Gaul, to meet and to serve the equally new Via Emilia between Rimini and Piacenza at Bologna.

That new road is of the first importance not only for Arezzo, but for the Val d'Arno. It entered the valley at Arezzo and followed it downward to Florence, and thence crossed the mountains. It followed most likely the exact route of the Via Aretina Vecchia between Arezzo and Florence, that is to say, it carefully followed the river and the valley almost the whole way.

That Roman road made and makes the whole value of the middle Val d'Arno.

We have seen what was the character of the Casentino, we have understood what was the greater, indeed the double, importance of the Val d'Arno Aretino, which looked both ways, northward to the Casentino and again north-westward to the Val d'Arno Superiore, both of which, with much more that lent it value, Arezzo commanded; the Val d'Arno Superiore, between the Stretto dell' Imbuto and Incisa, has this single value that it held the Roman road from Etruria, from Arezzo, that is, to Cisalpine Gaul, the Via Cassia.

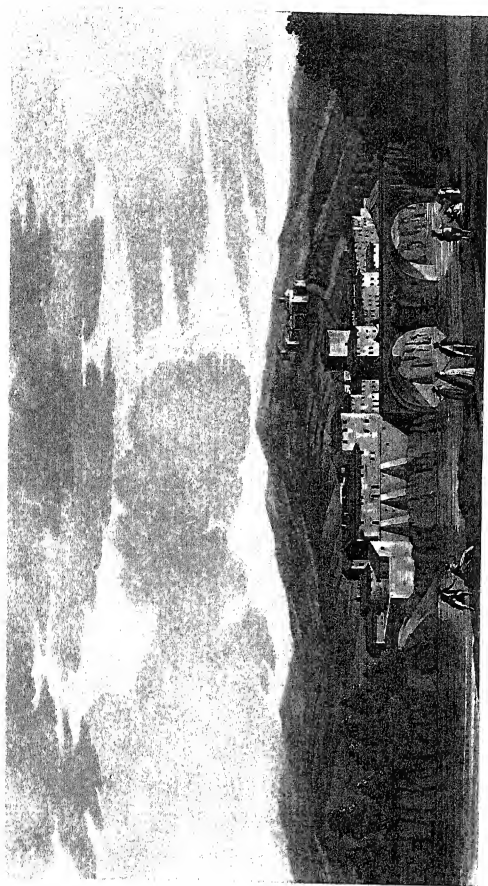
That long reach of the river is marked almost at the beginning by a curiously steep passage known as the Valle dell' Inferno, just beyond which, from the southern hills, the Ambra flows into the Arno. Here, according to some historians, a great branch of the Via Cassia from Chiusi joined again the main road that had passed through Arezzo and followed the valley. The place was known as Ad Ambrones; but the existence of this road is doubtful and its course, if it existed, wholly unknown, or at any rate uncertain, to-day. The Val d'Arno Superiore has indeed neither entrance nor exit save at its two ends. It is the loneliest as it is the least known part of the river.

One problem only it contains, and this we come upon at Incisa, where to-day the road crosses the river for the first time, having till now run ever upon the southern bank. At Incisa begins the *gola*, or gorge, that divides the Val d'Arno Superiore from the Val d'Arno Fiorentino. The

question is, did the Roman road, the Via Cassia, pass through this gorge and, following the valley, enter Florence on the north bank by the Porta alla Croce, or did it strike up into the hills out of the valley westward and, crossing the Poggio Firenze at S. Donato in Collina, enter Florence by the Porta S. Niccolò on the south, crossing the river by the Ponte Vecchio? According to Repetti it did the latter: the way by Pontassieve along the northern bank of the Arno, which was crossed at Incisa, being a much later and indeed a mediaeval way. And Repetti would seem to be right: for there is no record at all of a Roman bridge across the Arno at this point, or indeed anywhere upon the river above Florence.<sup>1</sup>

The long gorge of the Incisa comes to an end at Pontassieve, where the river turns finally westward and enters the Val d'Arno Fiorentino. And here for the first time since leaving Arezzo the valley is entered from outside. At Pontassieve two roads enter it, both upon the north, the lesser of these is the short cut from the Casentino about the northern base of the Pratomagno, over the Consuma Pass, of which I have already spoken; the more important is the great road that comes down from the high Apennine by the valley of the Sieve, which here falls into the Arno. This road, which is without any antiquity, crosses the Apennine range into the Romagna by the Passo di S. Godenzo,

<sup>1</sup> There may have been a Roman bridge at Ponte a Buriano; but we have no record of it. See *infra*, p. 109.



*Incisa*





following the Montone valley beyond, into Forlì, upon the great Via Emilia. It serves all the western part, on this side the watershed, of the Mugello, passes through two considerable towns, Dicomano and S. Godenzo, and affords one of the more eastern approaches from the middle valley of the Arno into Cisalpine Gaul.

There are to-day four great passages from the Val d'Arno Fiorentino into Cisalpine Gaul. Two of these proceed directly from Florence into the hills, one of them passing by the Futa to Bologna, the other by the Mugnone valley and the Olmo Pass to Faenza. Of the other two, one crosses the Apennines from Pistoja for Bologna, the other is this which starts from Pontassieve for Forlì. All, as it will be seen, find the Via Emilia at various cities upon it; but of the four only two are ancient, that of the Futa, the oldest of all, and that from Pistoja, both going to Bologna. Florence thus appears at once as a nodal point almost as important as Arezzo, even in Roman times, and soon, with the development of Tuscany, in the Middle Age, to be far more crucial, as we shall see.

We have seen that the Via Cassia, which from Arezzo proceeded at any rate as far as Incisa, through the Val d'Arno, entered Florence at last as we may think from S. Donato in Collina, by the Porta S. Niccolò upon the southern bank of the river. The Via Bolognese that crossed the Apennines by the Futa, the most ancient road of all, between western Tuscany and Cisalpine Gaul,

entered Florence upon the north. The Via Piſtojeſe, which proceeded through Seſto and Prato to Piſtoja, and thence crossed to Bologna, came into Florence upon the north-weſt. But theſe were not all; there was another and a Roman road, the Via Piſana, which followed the Val d'Arno up from Piſa and entered Florence upon the ſouth-weſt, while preſently, due ſouth, a road was driven, though not by the Romans, out of the ſouthern gate of Florence, ſoon to be called Porta Romana, which climbed into the Chianti by the Val di Greve, and crossing the Ponte della Caſtellina, found the Via Francigena at Poggibonſi and went on with it through Siena to Rome. Thus four Roman roads entered the city, on the north, north-weſt, ſouth-weſt, and ſouth, and met in her Forum. That Forum was upon the northern bank of the river, where the Piazza Vittorio Emanuele ſtands, and ſo it is at Florence that we find probably the firſt Roman bridge upon the Arno, the bridge which was the predecessor of that we call, and rightly, Ponte Vecchio.

It was probably the road that Caius Flaminius drove on from Arezzo to Bologna through the Val d'Arno in 187 B.C. that recreated Florence or, at any rate, formed there a Roman town at the river crossing upon the northern bank of the river. Such a ſite could never have been neglected, and, though it was only in the Middle Ages that all its amazing advantages became clear, even in Roman times it appears ſoon to have outſtripped Arezzo,

Main

was certainly especially patronized by Augustus Caesar, and in the second century of our era is spoken of by Florius as a *Municipium splendidissimum*. The great days of Arezzo where those in which she was the terminus of the Via Cassia; with the advance of that road after the Second Punic War her importance must necessarily have given way to the far more fundamental and various advantages of Florence.

We shall consider the site of Florence in all its unique interest later; here it will be enough to point out that Florence stands in the Val d'Arno where, after it has gradually opened out, in some twelve miles or more, into a plain at its greatest some three miles wide from north to south, it is suddenly closed again by the great headlands of Fiesole on the north and San Giorgio on the south. This stretch of ever widening valley between Pontassieve and the City of the Flower we may call the Val d'Arno Fiorentino Superiore; it has many beauties, but save that the Via Cassia probably came down from S. Donato in Collina at Bagno a Ripoli and thence proceeded along the left bank of the river into the Porta S. Niccolò of Florence, it lacks importance as no other stretch of the valley does. But if the Val d'Arno Fiorentino Superiore is barren of importance, it is far different with the Florentine reach below the city, the Val d'Arno Fiorentino Inferiore.

The Florentine plain, a long oval and now dry lake enclosed by mountains, is spread out north-

west from Florence, the river dividing it unequally, almost due east and west, into two parts, of which that to the north is by far the larger. At its south-eastern entrance from Val d'Arno this plain is held absolutely by Florence, as it is at its north-western exit by Pistoja. Due west, where the river leaves it, it is closed by the Stretto di Gonfolina. It is divided and watered upon the north, from north to south, by two considerable streams, both tributaries of Arno, the Bisenzo and the Ombrone; and is traversed by three greater roads, all of which come out of Florence and pass into Pistoja, the oldest being the Roman road through Sesto Fiorentino and Prato.

To the south of the river the smaller part of this plain, about three miles wide from north to south at its widest, and some nine miles long, is watered from the south by one considerable stream, the Greve, which flows into the Arno nearer to Florence than to the Gonfolina. One great road traverses it from east to west, the Via Pisana, a Roman highway from Florence to Pisa. In later times this came to be the most important of all Florentine roads, for it led to the sea. Like the Via Cassia in the Val d'Arno above Florence, it ever keeps to the south of the river.

This vast plain is in every way the riches of Florence and also its security. It is easily held, and to hold it was to make Florence as secure by force and art as Venice was by nature. And here, indeed, is the true secret of the Arno, its meaning

in history, which can only be understood if the nature of the plain be grasped.

The Arno from Florence to the sea waters the only considerable plain to the south of the Apennines, a plain which, if we consider it, as we should, in its whole extent, as including not only the plain of Florence but those of Empoli and Pisa, corresponds in its smaller and more various way, as I have said, with the great Cisalpine plain to the north of the Apennine. It may, and should, be asked, why, if that be so, if there be any true analogy between the valley of the Arno and that far greater valley of the Po, Pisa never had the opportunity of the career of Venice. The answer is twofold. The Val d'Arno opened westward to the Tyrrhene sea while the Cisalpine plain looked eastward and led to the Adriatic. In the Dark and Middle Ages in which Venice was enthroned, she looked to a civilization richer and more ancient than anything left in the West, she led to the East and was its gate. Pisa, on the other hand, stood on the verge of nothing, of barbarism—and led nowhere.

That is only part of the answer, but it is perhaps the most important part. There is this too, however, which is more particular: Venice was an island and enjoyed all the political independence of an island; Pisa was not. As an island Venice was physically impregnable from the mainland by any arms save those of the modern world. Pisa was easily vulnerable, always at the mercy of hatred, and died of a wound dealt her by Florence. And

not only was she thus not impregnable; geographically her position was infinitely weaker than that of Florence.

The paramount geographical position of Florence is obvious at once when we begin to examine the Val d'Arno. It is obvious that no city in the upper valley could ever have come to importance. Arezzo at the head of the middle valley, where the wide and enormous Val di Chiana opens a way into the very heart of central Italy, would seem to bid for supremacy, but only before the development of Etruria and Cisalpine Gaul by Rome. It held absolutely the one road to Rome, but this was more than balanced by a disadvantage that was fundamental. It controlled no real exit; for this it was at the mercy of Florence.

In the Middle Age Florence held every advantage but one; between it and the sea stood Pisa. It was established upon the river at a point which we see taken again and again in Europe by cities which are to play a great part. It was just, but only just, above the reach of the sea, that is to say, the Arno was navigable from the sea as far as Signa. It held two roads to Rome and two passes at least over the Apennine. It absolutely dominated the valley in which it lay, which it could close when it liked; above, anywhere between itself and Incisa, below, at the Gonfolina, which it soon controlled and always held strongly. It stood at the top, not at the bottom of the great plain, and when it held all the entrances, as it did before the middle of the four-

teenth century, it was, though not so safe as Venice, still sure enough. Thus in an ever growing security it matured till it was ready at last to dominate not only the whole Val d'Arno from its source to its mouth, and to bring under its absolute sway the only other cities of importance about it, first Arezzo, that held the road to Rome, then Pistoja, at the bottom of the Florentine plain that held the two exits, one over the Apennines and the other by the Val di Nievole, and lastly Pisa, which held the gate of the sea; but the whole of Tuscany also.

This extraordinary geographical position perhaps encouraged in Florence the fruitful spirit she possessed. For spiritually, too, she was more than a match for her opponents. At any rate, it is curious that all her enemies were at the mercy of that sterile dream, so far from any sense of reality, which we call Ghibellinism. She was Guelf and as clairvoyant of the future as they were dull and blind to it.

I said that Florence, holding the Arno at the eastern end of the plain, which she there closed with an absolute grasp, could close it too at the western exit from her rich *contado*, that is to say at the Stretto di Gonfolina. This is the greatest and most important pass upon the river, and it divides the rich plains of the Val d'Arno Fiorentino from the plains of Empoli and Pisa. It was a capital thing upon the river, the visible gateway to the sea, and it is not surprising to find that it was



threatened or held by not less than five fortresses, two at each end and one on the hills to the south.

For nine miles through the gorge, on the left bank of the river, the Via Pisana runs till at Montelupo it enters the great plain of Empoli and the Val d'Arno Inferiore.

Two capital facts stand out concerning the Val d'Arno Inferiore. The Arno there receives from the south two tributaries, the Pesa at Montelupo and the Elsa, a few miles west of Empoli; and is at the mouth of the Elsa crossed by the greatest of all the mediaeval highways, a road to Rome, the great way of the Franks into Italy, the Via Francigena. This mighty road, as important to the valley in its way as the Via Cassia itself, is full of all the romance and wars of mediaeval Italy. Because of it, Empoli stood where she stands; to hold it the fortresses of Fucecchio on the north of the river and S. Miniato on the south were built. It was, in the Middle Age, the capital way out of Lombardy into Italy and to Rome. It is full of armies and full of riches, it serves all the loveliest cities of Central Italy, upon it they hang as beads upon a rosary, by it they lived, without it they could never have blossomed or rejoiced. To it Siena owed nearly everything, Buonconvento all its fame, Bolsena, Montefiascone, even Viterbo, more than we can tell. It left the Via Emilia at Parma, crossed the Apennine by the Cisa Pass, descended by the Lunigiana to the Tyrrhene Sea, entered Tuscany at Sarzana, passed quite through Lucca,

entered Val d'Arno here between Fucecchio and S. Miniato al Tedesco, and passed by the Val d'Elsa into the heart of Central Italy. It lends its great distinction to the Val d'Arno Inferiore, to which it gives half its meaning and significance.

That wide plain of Empoli, across which the Arno runs so slowly, forded there below Empoli by the great road which was served by no bridge I think, is closed again westward at Pontedera by the Colline delle Cerbaje on the north and the Monte di S. Miniato on the south: though only for a moment. After sweeping southward the river turns suddenly north below the pass and, receiving the Era, passes into the immense and melancholy plain of Pisa, the sea plain indeed, Val d'Arno Pisano.

It is not the Era, the only tributary it receives in this part of its course, that marks for us the Val d'Arno Inferiore. Lovely as it is, the Val d'Era is sterile; follow it and it leads nowhere; or rather, it leads you out beyond history into a world of giants, without meaning for us, full only of amazement. It leads to all the monumental loneliness and death that is Volterra. What gives meaning and significance to this last basin of the Arno is the sea and the great and beautiful city that stands there between it and the valley, Pisa.

The position of Pisa is such that at first sight it might seem to have every advantage. Within reach of the sea, set too upon a great road, the Via Aurelia, which passed from Rome along the

seashore of Etruria, served, too, by the Arno, which passed quite through the city, as it did through Florence, Pisa one would think should have become easily the greatest power in the Val d'Arno. That she did not was due to various things, each of which was dangerous, and all of which together were fatal, to her supremacy.

Though set upon the sea, she looked west and led nowhere; the Roman road she held led northward, it is true, into the Lunigiana, where it joined the Via Francigena, but southward it disappeared into all the barren misery of the Maremma. Nor was her position in Val d'Arno really as fortunate as it appeared. The huge delta of the Arno was little better than a morass. The roads across it were almost incapable of defence, while naturally more secure by far, scarce fifteen miles away, hidden by the isolated Monti Pisani, lay Lucca at the foot of the mountains, in secure possession of the great mountain pass of the Serchio and of the Francigena which passed in and out of her gates. Pisa, indeed, was at once accessible and indefensible. In her marsh every stale and feverish dream found a congenial home. Her position with regard to the Via Francigena might seem to have forced her into the arms of the Ghibellines and thus to have won her spiritual allegiance to a dying cause; while her divided interests upon sea and land always forced her to a decision she was never able to make. On the sea she faced Genoa and went down because she was not free as Genoa

was to throw all her heart upon the waters; on land she was continually bled by Lucca, whose position was so unique that she alone in all Tuscany kept her independence to the end; while the ever growing power of Florence, slowly rising, at last came down like a flood and overwhelmed a city whose fate proves how dangerous it is to serve two masters. After the victory of Florence in 1406 it is said that those whom plague and war had left in Pisa emigrated, so that there was scarcely left a Pisan in the city for the victors to rule.

Little Florence cared for this; in her strong hands henceforth were the sea gates of Arno, not the desolate but beautiful Bocca d'Arno we know, where, after the melancholy of the long sea-reach, the river meets the sea at last amid a glory of flowers, but the old Porto Pisano to the south, close to which Florence presently established, to supersede it, the free town of Livorno, when, with the fall of Pisa, the whole valley was one, Florentine from source to sea.

## II

### THE VALLEY ENCLOSED

#### THE CASENTINO—STIA TO POPPI

##### I. THE VALLEY ENCLOSED

THERE ARE TWO WAYS FROM FLORENCE INTO the Casentino, the upper valley of the Arno. The easier and the more obvious, the way of the tourist, is that by train to Arezzo and so by the little line that serves all the Casentino through Bibbiena and Poppi to Pratovecchio and Stia at the head of the valley under Falterona. But the finer and the more adventurous way lies over the Consuma Pass from Pontassieve in Val d'Arno Fiorentino Superiore, where you may drive or, what is better, go afoot, up into the hills through the woods in sight of Vallombrosa, and, crossing the northern saddle of Pratomagno, descend by a good road in some three or four hours to Stia. This is the way of the traveller, the way of armies too, for by this road over the Consuma, came the Florentines and their allies, the young Dante among them, in 1289, to the great fight at Campaldino which, rightly understood, decided the fate of this Valley Enclosed.

But to come thus to Stia and the little inn there at the head of the Casentino is not enough.

The traveller who would rightly understand the

Casentino, would seize it, as it were, all at a glance, must climb up from Stia on some clear day of late spring or summer or autumn very early in the morning to the summit of Falterona, upon whose southern flank very high up Arno has its source.

Stia stands at the head of the Casentino, the Valley Enclosed, just beyond the terminus of the little railway that comes up the valley all the way beside the river from Arezzo, and it is a climb of some three or four hours from the steep little town under the ruined castle of Porciano to the Ricovero Dante, the refuge built by the Italian Alpine Club on the *cima* of Falterona, 5,426 feet above the sea. The reward is worth all the hardness of the way through the wide sheepfolds, the scrub, and the precipitous rocks. For from that high place upon the crest of this outpost of the Apennine the whole of the wild mountain country of the Romagna to the north, and the softer hills of Tuscany, as far as Mont' Amiata, a ghost on the horizon, to the south, lie beneath one between the light of the two seas east and west.

To the north all is a naked wilderness of mountain, almost inhuman in its tremendous and impotent gesture, its brooding mystery, its fierce barrenness. By such a desolation is Italy enclosed. It might seem, indeed, that in so appalling a chaos and loneliness no road could pass, no life could endure. But little by little in this restless waste you begin to discern the amazing habitations of men: Bagno di Romagna, perhaps, far away to the east, S.

Godenzo a little to the west, close under Falterona; while, if you know where to look beyond Rocca S. Casciano in the valley of the Montana, you may divine, if you cannot descry, Dovàdola; and beyond, bounding all the north, the vast plain of Emilia, across which, north-westward, at the foot of the mountains, runs the great Roman highway, the Via Emilia. Bagno, S. Godenzo, Dovàdola, all were intimately connected with the Casentino, for all were castles of the Conti Guidi who, in the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries, possessed and governed that valley.

Turning southward you look from the summit of Falterona upon a country scarcely less fierce if certainly less desolate. Over all towers the lion head of Monte La Verna. To the west stands the great range of the Pratomagno, a vast headland thrust out southward from the central Apennine about which Arno winds like an uncaught girdle. Beyond lies Florence. To the east lies the great range of the Apennines like a vast wall running south, while before one the valley falls away: the valley enclosed by these tremendous barriers, the valley of the Arno by which the famous river passes first on its way to the sea.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In 1838 owing to the chance find by a shepherdess of a small bronze statuette of Hercules, extensive digging operations took place in the dried lake of the Cima, and an enormous quantity of Etruscan and Roman (300 B.C.) bronze statuettes of Mars, Diana, Hercules; coins, fibule, trinkets, and armour was found. It is said that in those times the waters of this mountain top were considered of healing

A thousand feet beneath the summit of Falterona, upon this its southern flank, in a cleft of the brutally piled-up rocks, among low-growing beeches, Arno first gushes forth amid many a singing rivulet in seven springs, which presently unite and set forth over the high lands loudly joyful. There can be few places more naturally sacred; instinctively one is silent and bows the head.

Lying there at midday in the coolness of the rocks, the river ever singing as it goes, the valley winding away between the castled hills below, half lost in the shining heat, the history of the Valley Enclosed comes back to you. You see the old ruined strongholds of the Guidi one after another, Porciano, Romana, Castel S. Niccolò, Poppi; you remember the sanctuaries, Camaldoli on the flank of the Apennines, Badia a Prataglia, Vallombrosa just over the crest of Pratomagno, and that, holiest of all, whose naked height towers over the valley south and east, dividing Val d'Arno from Val di Tevere, La Verna, where S. Francis received the wounds of Our Lord. For the Guidi were not quite alone in this Valley Enclosed; here, too, was the peace of God that

powers, and the statuettes and trinkets were votive offerings thrown into the lake by the sick and ailing. Until the end of the first Roman Empire this lake was a place of pilgrimage. The valuable collection of bronzes was sold to different European museums, the British Museum and the Louvre being among the purchasers.



by how many ages has outlasted the Guidi. And yet how absolutely that mighty house possessed the Valley in the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries!

## II. THE CONTI GUIDI

The origin of the great and noble house of Guidi is for the most part hidden from us. According to Villani they derived from a certain Count Guido, by others called Tegrino, who came into Italy from Germany, where his forbears had been great barons, with the Emperor Otho I. Villani asserts that the Emperor gave him the territory of Modigliana in Romagna, but according to others Count Guido took it for himself when he wooed and won in most romantic fashion Engelrada, the daughter of the Duke of Ravenna, the lady of Modigliana. It seems she was beautiful as well as powerful and greatly sought after. Guido passing her castle one day killed a white doe which he sent her as a present, and she, when she saw him, loved him, so that he won her at once. They, it seems, had a son Guido who became lord over almost all Romagna and had his headquarters in Ravenna, "but because of the outrages he wrought on the citizens concerning their wives, and other tyrannies, in a popular tumult he and his house were driven out of Ravenna, pursued, and slain in one day, so that none escaped, either small or great, save one young child named Guido, the which was at Modigliana at nurse." He lived to take a

dreadful revenge upon the Ravennati for the massacre of his family, and was known thereafter as Guido Bevisangue because he licked his sword clean of their blood when they had paid him.

The Guidi were perhaps established in the Casentino by Otho I,<sup>1</sup> at any rate, Bevisangue there founded the Badia di Strumi, near Poppi. His son Guido was, according to Peter Damian, a bad man whom the devils expected in hell. We know little of his son, but his grandson, the first Guidoguerra, was the friend and adviser of the famous Countesses Beatrice and Matilda of Tuscany, the latter, indeed, adopted his successor, Guidoguerra II, as her son and he was known as the Marquis. Guidoguerra III was also a famous man, but in another cause, for he acted as counsellor to Barbarossa. He was the greatest noble in all Italy, and died in 1157 to the sorrow of the whole country. His sister was a most notable woman. Her name was Sofia, and she became Abbess of S. Giovanni di Prato-vecchio, which her mother the Countess Emilia had founded for her. When she became a nun she refused to allow the Bishop to veil her, but took the veil herself from the altar, saying: "I myself give myself to the Lord Jesus Christ." During the minority of her brother's son, Guido-

<sup>1</sup> Villani says by Otho IV, but his whole story of Gualdrada is impossible as applying to Guidoguerra IV (Guido il Vecchio that is), in 1213, and may well be true in the main of Engelrada, Guido her husband, and Otho I. Boccaccio repeats Villani.

guerra IV, she ruled the Guidi territories from Pratovecchio.

Guidoguerra IV is Villani's Guido Vecchio. He was brought up at the court of the Emperor and became the most famous and the greatest of his house. He married in or before 1180 Gualdrada, the daughter of Bellincione Berti. It is of this marriage that Villani tells the romantic tale, repeated by Boccaccio, which may perhaps apply to Engelrada and the first Guido. Count Guido Vecchio, says he, took to wife the daughter of Messer Bellincione Berti of the Ravignani, the greatest and most honoured knight in Florence, and his houses were at Porta San Piero, above the old gate, and these descended by heritage to the Counts as the Florentines called the Guidi. Villani tells a romantic and well-known story of this marriage. "The lady," says he, "was named Gualdrada, and Count Guido took her for her beauty and her fair speech, beholding her in S. Reparata with the other ladies and maidens of Florence. For when the Emperor Otho IV came to Florence and saw the fair ladies of the city assembled in S. Reparata in his honour, this maiden most pleased him; and her father, saying to the Emperor that he had it in his power to bid her kiss him, the maiden made reply that there was no man living which should kiss her save he were her husband, for the which speech the Emperor much commended her; and the said Count Guido, being taken with love of her by reason of her gracious-

ness and by the counsel of the said Otho the Emperor, took her to wife, not regarding that she was of less noble lineage than he, nor regarding her dowry; whence all the Counts Guido are born from the said Count and the said lady."

Count Guidoguerra IV, beside being the greatest lord of his house, had a sufficiently romantic life to be able to dispense with this famous story. He not only married "the chaste Gualdrada," but was reprimanded by the Pope Innocent III for bringing play-actresses into the silence of Camaldoli. With him the unquestioned power of the Guidi passed. The imperial defeat at Legnano, the victory of the communes of the Lombard League in 1177, had put all such claims as his in jeopardy. He lived to understand and to use the new times, and when he died his five sons were Florentine citizens; but he made a fatal mistake when, thinking to outface the future, he equally divided his five hundred castles in Tuscany and Romagna among them. The family was soon divided against itself.

The names of Guidoguerra's sons were Guido, Ruggero, Tegrimo, Aghinolfo, and Marcovaldo. Ruggero went to Sicily in the train of Frederick II and died there in 1225, his five brothers becoming his heirs. Guido became Count of Bagno in Romagna, and of Poppi and Battifolle in Casentino. Tegrimo took Porciano and Aghinolfo took Romena in Casentino, while Marcovaldo had Dovàdola in Romagna. The last became Guelf,

and his son Guidoguerra was a famous Guef whom Dante finds in Hell:

. . . grandchild of the chaſte  
Gualdrada, him they Guidoguerra call'd  
Who in his lifetime many a noble act  
Achieved both by his wiſdom and his ſword.  
*Inferno*, xvi, 37-40 (Cary).

One of the noble acts achieved by Guidoguerra was, as head of the Guef party and vicar in Tuscany for Charles of Anjou, to vote againſt the Florentine expedition againſt the Sieneſe which, as he had foreſeen, for he had heard of the arrival of the German reinforcements, reſulted in the Guef diſaſter of Montaperto (1260). Upon the morrow of that terrible day, when the City of the Flower lay wholly at the mercy of the City of the Virgin and the Guefs everywhere were diſcomfited, Guidoguerra's couſin, Guidonovello, was more eager than any other for the deſtruction of Florence, and when this was denied him he got himſelf appointed Poдеſtà, and there built the Via Ghibellina in memory of the battle. It looks right towards his home in the Caſentino. But he fell after Benevento, and was ignominiouſly turned out of the city he had wiſhed to deſtroy. Again Guidoguerra entered Florence as Vicar-General in Tuscany for the Church, but in 1272 he died.

He was ſucceeded by his nephew, Guido Salvatico, whom Dante fought beſide at Campaldino. There, at the moſt famous of all the fights fought in Caſentino, he led the Sieneſe, while

Guidonovello led the Aretini. The latter fled, not without shame, and shut himself up in his castle of Poppi, but in the following year the Florentines burnt him out; and when, four years later, he died, Guido, the son of his brother, Count Simone of Battifolle, who had become a Guelph with his father for hatred of Guidonovello, got Poppi and helped Florence, which he later ruled from 1316 to 1321 for King Robert the Wise of Naples, and held against the Emperor Henry VII when he appeared in Italy and, at Dante's behest, laid futile siege to the city. It was he, indeed, who built the Palazzo Vecchio, and as Villani says in imitation of his castle of Poppi.

But the appearance of the Florentines in the valley at Campaldino in 1289 was the beginning of the end of the Guidi. Their divisions, then exposed, were but confirmed later when Henry VII appeared, and Florence, taking advantage of these, having looked at last upon their goodly dominion, determined slowly to be rid of them. By every means she broke them, encouraging their hatred one of another, and the rebellion of the vassals of each. She was never without good excuse, and when one fell the others rejoiced.

The beginning of the end of the Counts of Porciano, for instance, was the insult offered to an ambassador of the Republic by the Count Alberto, who forced him to eat the summons he brought him to appear before the Signoria. His nephews, who murdered him, had the protection of the

Republic and were thus no longer independent. The line ended when the son of the last Count entered Camaldoli, leaving all his heritage to Florence. Minor castles of this branch of the Guidi, the castles of Urbech and Palagio, endured longer but were without importance. Pratovecchio of the Dovàdola house came into the hands of Florence even before Porciano, indeed soon after the death of the Emperor Henry VII, and when the grandsons of Aghinolfo of Romena began to quarrel Florence seized Romena, so that by the middle of the fourteenth century there only remained in Casentino the Counts of Bagno and Battifolle, who were in possession of Poppi. Their house had become Guelf and strongly Florentine when, for hatred of Guido Novello, Count Simone of Battifolle had forsaken the Ghibelline cause. The Republic continued to use them and to find them work while at the same time she weakened them. For instance, it was Count Simone of Battifolle and Poppi who, in 1343, seized the Duke of Athens, who had made himself tyrant in Florence, and imprisoned him at Poppi, and there forced him to abdicate his usurped lordship over the city. But though in return Florence assisted the Count against his enemies, and especially against the Tarlati of Arezzo, who had seized the fortress of Fronzola, hard by Poppi, it was only at a price, the price of dependence, which his sons Roberto and Carlo had to pay. Roberto was a cultured man and in correspondence with

Petrarch, whom he invited to Casentino, but he only left a daughter Elisabetta to succeed him, his brother Carlo having a son, Roberto Novello. It was Roberto who got Poppi, Elisabetta inheriting the castle of Borgo alla Collina. Of course they quarrelled; Roberto even carrying her prisoner to Poppi, and when Florence interfered he was fool enough to ally himself with Milan and make Florence his enemy. The Republic raised an army, broke him, imprisoned him, pardoned him, and when again he rebelled made him a fugitive, so that he died in hiding in Castel Castagnaio. His son, Francesco, was the last of the Guidi. His whole life was spent in an attempt to avenge his father and his house upon Florence. He, too, sided with Milan, invited her *condottieri* into the Casentino, assaulted the strongholds of Florence, and burned the vineyards of her vassals and murdered her peasants. Florence let him alone till she had defeated the Milanese, then she turned upon him and Neri Capponi appeared before Poppi, laid siege to it, and presently received its surrender in exchange for the life of its master, who ended his days in Bologna. This befell in 1440, in which year Florence thus came into absolute possession of the Casentino.

### III. DANTE IN THE VALLEY

It might seem of little use to note the rise and fall of such a dynasty as this of the Guidi, and would, indeed, be of little interest were it not that



the castles of their house still crown the hills of the Valley Enclosed and give it more than half of its character and story. Nor is this all. It is not only the ghosts of these nobles that we meet and recognize with so little enthusiasm, it must be confessed, in Casentino, nor only the glorious figures of great saints, of S. Romuald, of S. Giovanni Gualberto, of S. Francis, best and most beloved of all, that linger among these hills; there stalks in all his loneliness and pride one who knew and loved or hated them all, in whose enduring pages they all appear carved in the adamant of his verse as he thought of them and judged them for ever. Dante Alighieri has passed this way, and in his poem there is no Italian house that is spoken of so often as the Conti Guidi, nor is there any other perhaps with which he himself was so closely concerned.

That Dante knew the valley as though it were his own is proved in a dozen passages of his great comedy. As a young man he fought at Campaldino and saw Buonconte die; as an exile he trod its hard ways and, perhaps at Poppi, but certainly in the valley, learned how hard it is to climb another's stairs. That he was the guest of the Guidi we know, but of which house and where he stayed we are ignorant. He speaks, however, of the House as a whole in the *Paradiso*; in the sixteenth canto of the *Inferno* we meet Guidoguerra of Dovàdola, the grandson of "the chaste Gualdrada" on the verge of the eighth circle of hell,

suffering for the same sin as was Brunetto Latini; and it is in the thirteenth canto of the same poem, in the tenth gulf, among the forgers and alchemists, that we come upon the coiner Adamo, who speaks of the brothers of the Romena house who employed him in his crime. There we have perhaps the most moving and certainly the most lovely reference to the Casentino. Who that walks in Casentino does not know these rustling streams,

The rills that glitter down the grassy slopes  
Of Casentino, making fresh and soft  
The banks whereby they glide to Arno's stream.

Who that has ever known them can forget them any more than could Messer Adamo?

It is, however, in the fourteenth canto of the *Purgatorio* that Dante gives us his fullest description of Casentino and indeed of the whole of the Val d'Arno, referring with angry contempt and scorn to its three great cities, Arezzo, Florence, Pisa, the dogs of Arezzo from whom Arno turns away its snout, the wolves of Florence who pollute Arno with their jaws, the foxes of Pisa; while as for the Casentino, he speaks of the castle of Porciano, just above Stia, where, amid brute swine (*porci*), the Arno first shapes its way.

Dante was in Casentino more than once in his life; he probably spent long months there. He came first, perhaps, as a young man full of hope over the Consuma to fight at Campaldino. Did he take the same road in exile? Who knows?

Certainly Boccaccio assures us in his life of Dante that he passed many years of his exile as the guest of Count Guido Salvatico of Dovàdola, and there is a strong tradition that he was imprisoned at Porciano, while his two letters to Henry VII are entitled *sub fonte Sarni*. More than once, may be, he crossed the pass out of the valley to S. Godenzo, where he certainly signed the alliance with the Ubaldini upon 8th June 1302. There can be little doubt either that he dwelt at Romena; but all we can certainly say is that he knew the valley as no other has known it, and that it is even yet his figure rather than that of any saint or great lord we seem to see continually passing to and fro under the rustling poplars beside Arno in the sun, the wind, and the rain, brooding on the fall of man and the future to which he more than any other man of his calibre was deaf and blind. That he loved the valley he seems to tell us whenever he speaks of it, and more especially, perhaps, in the *canzone* which begins:

Amor, dacchè convien pur ch'io mi doglia

in which he speaks of his love for an Alpighiana lady, the Lady of the Casentino, perhaps a Guidi, but who she was we shall never know. There he speaks of the valley of the river amid the Alps beside which love was ever strong upon him.

Così m'hai concio, Amore, in mezzo l'alpi,  
nella valle del fiume,  
lungo in qual sempre sopra me sei forte. . . .

## THE VALLEY ENCLOSED

O montanina mia Canzon, tu vai,  
forse vedrai Fiorenza la mia terra ;  
che fuor di se mi serra  
vota d'amore e nuda di pietate.  
Se dentro v'entri, va dicendo ; omai  
non vi può fare il mio signor più guerra. . . .

At least this is certain, that love it as he might,  
in the Casentino Dante was an exile.

### IV. FROM STIA TO POPPI

The little town of Stia with its steep street, the first town of the Casentino, has not very much to show the traveller, but it makes the best starting-place from which to climb Falterona, and is the key to more than one place of importance. It stands picturesquely enough at the confluence of the Staggia, from which it gets its name, with the Arno, at the foot of Falterona, and is altogether as charming and gay a place as one would wish for. Of very ancient origin in spite of its modern air, its cloth mills, and well-being, in 1220 it came into the hands of Tegrimo de' Guidi, lord of Porciano, and it was his son Bandino who built the fortified villa of Palagio opposite the town on the left bank of the Staggia from which, later, a branch of the Guidi took its name. Palagio, however, has almost entirely disappeared; Stia remains.

The most interesting thing left to us in the little town is the Pieve in the steep main street which, like those of Romena, of Strada and Montemignaiò,

dates certainly from the twelfth century. Basilical in form, its great rude columns, curiously carved capitals, and round arches in the nave, still speak of the early Middle Age, and though it has been partly modernized and restored, still, in the main, it is of that time. It possesses beside, more than one delicious work of the Renaissance. But more important is a picture of the Madonna and Child with two red and gold winged angels by an anonymous Tuscan master of the second half of the thirteenth century: a rare thing in these parts. The picture is half hidden by a "Madonna of Pompei" on the altar of S. Anthony. In the chapel on the gospel side of the choir is a fine picture on a gold ground, painted in 1408, of the Madonna assumed into heaven, giving her girdle to S. Thomas, who stretches forth his hands among the kneeling Apostles below. The work, not untouched but still charming, is given by most critics to the so-called "Maestro del Bambino Vispo," an anonymous Florentine master of the first half of the fifteenth century. In the chapel on the epistle side is a fine *ciborio*, or tabernacle, by the school of Giovanni della Robbia.

A far finer work of this sort, a genuine early piece by Giovanni della Robbia himself, is to be seen in the Palazzo Comunale, representing the half-figure of the Madonna with our little Lord in her arms. Of old this stood in a shrine by the wayside. In the Madonna del Ponte, too, there is an altar-piece of the Madonna and Child with

SS. Sebastian and Roch, which is reminiscent of Giovanni's work on the hospital façade at Pistoja, in the realistic figure of S. Roch and the seated brown clad, blue cloaked Virgin. The usual garlands of fruit form the pilasters on either side of this pleasing group, meeting above in a border of fine blue and white arabesques.

Stia is quite surrounded by the castles of the Guidi. Upon the farther bank of the Staggia, as I have said, a few fragments of the castle of Palagio may still be seen. Upon the right bank of that stream, just above Stia, is the lofty old castle of Urbech, a massive huddle of walls and gates. Higher still, above Papiano, there still stands a lonely church at Gaviserri, marking the place of another of their strongholds. This little half-deserted place is worth a visit if only because the church still keeps a fine altar-piece of the fifteenth century of the Madonna and Child enthroned between SS. John Baptist, Clement, Bartholomew, and Anthony, perhaps by some pupil of Lorenzo di Credi; while the little tabernacle of marble of the fifteenth century is worth more than a glance.

These are the flowers by the wayside. Better worth seeing, perhaps, though one would gladly omit none of these things, is the Oratorio di S. Maria delle Grazie, in the Arno valley, above Stia. The way lies under the magnificent towered ruin of the castle of Porciano, where, according to the legend, Dante was imprisoned by the Counts. The castle is little more than a shell, but the place

is worth reaching if only because the little church there possesses a triptych by Bicci di Lorenzo dating from 1414, in which we see the Annunciation in the midst, with four attendant saints at the sides, S. Margaret and S. John Evangelist, S. Michael and S. James. Beneath, in the predella, are three scenes: the Miracle of Monte Gargano, the Nativity of Christ, S. John Evangelist in a cauldron of boiling oil. The central panel of the Nativity is particularly charming.

It is not very far from Porciano to S. Maria delle Grazie, under the cypresses and poplars. The little oratory stands high and is worth any trouble to see even for its own sake, while the treasures it still happily possesses make the journey to it a necessity. It owes its origin to the plague of 1428, during which the Blessed Virgin appeared one day to a certain poor peasant called Monna Vanna, and bidding her tell the people of Stia of her vision, ordered that a church should be built in this place. Monna Vanna was not believed, however, when she told her tale; so once again the Blessed Virgin appeared to her, and this time gave her a lighted taper which, though the wind blew a hurricane, was not put out. This wonder convinced the people of Stia and Porciano so that they set to work and built a little sanctuary here on the hill-side, which was presently burnt down. The building we see was erected by the Ospedale di S. Maria Nuova, of Florence, as the arms over the doorway would suggest. In the seventeenth

century it was served by the monks of Vallombrosa, and they built beside it a little dwelling which they called Vallombrosella, which now serves to house the priest.

S. Maria delle Grazie is chiefly remarkable for its wealth of Robbia ware; the cornice of the choir being a frieze of cherubim from the hands of that school, while at the angles are set medallions of similar work representing the Four Evangelists, and on either side a pleasing lunette representing the Nativity and the Blessed Virgin appearing to Monna Vanna, between S. Giovanni Gualberto and the shepherd Piero, who was with Monna Vanna when the Virgin appeared to her the second time. Two other works of the school of Giovanni also may be seen in the church, an Annunciation on the epistle side of the nave and a charming holy-water stoup.

Nor is this all that S. Maria delle Grazie has to give us. Over the altar is a Florentine picture of the fourteenth century, by Lorenzo di Niccolò Gerini, representing the Madonna and Child with Saints. And there, too, is a little shrine of marble in which is kept a piece of the rock upon which the Madonna stood when she appeared to Monna Vanna. In the nave, too, upon the gospel side, is a fresco painted in 1485 of the Madonna and Child with Donor (a fine portrait) by some Florentine master influenced by Verrocchio, while over the door upon the other side is a poor panel of the Madonna and Child with S. John the

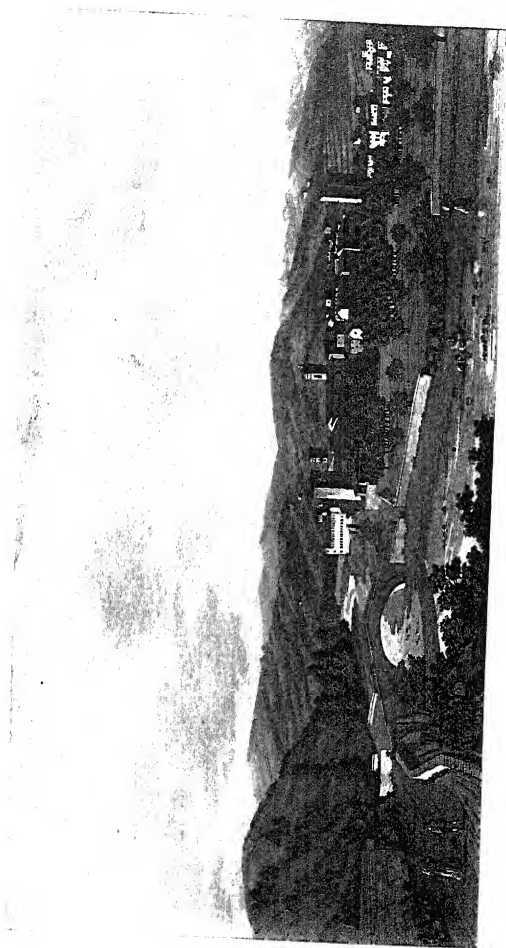


Baptist adoring the Infant Jesus, by the same hand.

From S. Maria delle Grazie there is a fine view of the broken tower of Castel Castagnaio, a very ancient Guidi fortress, which came at last to the Counts of Battifolle till Florence took it in 1440. It would not be worth a visit but for the glorious view it affords of the wooded valley and the Apennines from Falterona to La Verna.

From Stia the road follows the river all the way to Pratovecchio, scarcely a mile below. Pratovecchio is, I think, more charming than smiling Stia, for it still retains, though in vain, parts of its old walls and towers, and its cloistered streets are delightful in the sun or the rain which, in this high valley, so often divide the day between them. The place was an important stronghold of the Guidi, the home of that Countess Emilia who here established a convent of Camaldolense, of which her daughter Sofia became the famous Abbess ruling all the valley round about for her nephew Guidoguerra IV, who was but a child. The Dovàdola house, however, got the place at last, and here, according to Boccaccio, Dante was the guest of Guido Salvatico.

The old convent of the Camaldolense, where Countess Sofia ruled so well as Abbess, stands over the river and happily still fulfils the purpose for which it was founded. Indeed, Pratovecchio is proud of its nuns, both these ladies of the Order of Camaldoli, the Monache Vecchie, and those who



*Prato Vecchio*



follow the Rule of S. Dominic, the Monache Nuove, and we have only to regret that the old monastery, the most ancient religious house in this part of the valley, the Badia di Poppiana, below Pratovecchio, has been suppressed and half destroyed. Its church, now secularized and spoilt, boasts still, however, of an early fifteenth-century picture behind the high altar, an Annunciation between SS. John the Baptist and Mary Magdalen, on a gold ground, by Giovanni dal Ponte. A work by the same master, once in the church of S. Giovanni Evangelista here, is now in the National Gallery, a noble and elaborate work.<sup>1</sup> And there still remains in the church of S. Maria some good frescoes now somewhat spoilt.

Pratovecchio was the home of Jacopo del Casentino, and also probably of Giovanni del Biondo.

Upon the right bank of the Arno, opposite Pratovecchio, stands upon its great hill the ruined castle of Romena, of Etruscan origin, once among the most important, and now, certainly, in ruin the most tragic of the Guidi castles, a terrible, and under a darkling sky, an appalling place. But one of its fourteen towers is still standing, but the great keep, the Torre del Mastio, still remains to bear witness to the impregnable strength of the place. There, amid that huddle of old walls and gates and broken stones upon that dark and isolated hill, about which Arno winds suddenly, the

<sup>1</sup> Nos. 580 and 580A.

great Counts Guido, Alessandro, Aghinolfo, once had their home, and we remember them only because Dante speaks of them and they appear with Romena in one of the most terrible passages of the *Inferno*. The place is itself like a passage of that terrible poem in which it lives as the scene of the crime of the coiner Maestro Adamo of Brescia to which the Counts drove him. It is he whom Dante finds in the tenth gulf of hell; it is he who addresses the poet:

O ye! who in this world of misery,  
Wherefore I know not, are exempt from pain  
—Thus he began—attentively regard  
Adamo's woe. When living, full supply  
Ne'er lack'd me of what most I coveted;  
One drop of water now, alas, I crave.  
The rills that glitter down the grassy slopes  
Of Casentino, making fresh and soft  
The banks whereby they glide to Arno's stream,  
Stand ever in my view; and not in vain;  
For more the pictured semblance drew me up,  
Much more than the disease, which makes the flesh  
Desert these shrivelled cheeks. So from the place,  
Where I transgressed, stern justice urging me,  
Takes means to quicken more my labouring sighs.  
There is Romena, where I falsified  
The metal with the Baptist's form imprest,  
For which on earth I left my body burnt.  
But if I here might see the sorrowing soul  
Of Guido, Alessandro, or their brother,  
For Branda's limpid spring I would not change  
The welcome sight. One is e'en now within,  
If truly the mad spirits tell, that round  
Are wandering. But wherein besteads me that?  
My limbs are fettered. Were I but so light,

## THE VALLEY ENCLOSED

That I each hundred years might move one inch,  
I had set forth already on the path,  
Seeking him not amidst the shameless crew  
Although eleven miles it wind, not less  
Than half of one across. They brought me down  
Among this tribe; induced by them, I stamp'd  
The florins with three carats of alloy.

*Inferno*, xxx (Cary).

“Fontebranda’s limpid spring” lies just below the castle towards the Pieve. It is now scarcely more than a tiny pool beneath the ruined archway, but in the fourteenth century was doubtless fresh and plentiful enough. It meant all freshness to Maestro Adamo.

The Pieve, something less than a mile below the castle, lonely on its beautiful hill-side, is perhaps the noblest of the Romanesque churches in the Casentino, though it has lost the last two bays of the nave and the sculpture of the capitals without has been almost entirely spoilt. The church, which according to an inscription upon the last column on the epistle side, would seem to date from 1152, is a basilica with an apsidal eastern end beautifully supported by columns and lighted by round arched windows. Without this is as noble as it is within, but it is within the church as a whole shows at its best. Here the sculptured capitals are wonderfully perfect, and the solemn form of the building in its simplicity and beauty imposes itself even upon the most careless. The crypt would seem to belong to an older building, of which other traces remain. Three works of art adorn the sanctuary. Two of

these are pictures of the fourteenth century painted on a gold ground. In the first we see the Madonna and Child, in the second we have part of an old altar-piece in which we still see the Madonna and Child with SS. Peter and Paul, and the donor, possibly a Guidi. On the single side-panel left us are depicted SS. John Baptist and Anthony. The third picture, another Madonna and Child, is later and dates from the fifteenth century.

Up and down beside Arno, within sound of the rustling poplars, the way leads down stream to Borgo alla Collina, where once stood the great castle or palace of the Contessa Elisabetta Guidi of Battifolle, which stood away on the hill westward, and of which little to-day remains. The Countess, as we have seen, was at last compelled by the greed and enmity of her kinsman of Bagno and Poppi to abandon the place to the keeping of Florence, she herself retiring to that city, where she died. To hold the place the Republic presently appointed Cristoforo Landino as governor, for Borgo was his birthplace and there he lies buried. Landino had been tutor to Lorenzo de' Medici, and it was with him that Lorenzo and his friends spent many a summer day here in Casentino, but at Camaldoli, talking of philosophy—discussions which soon became famous in Landino's *Disputationes Camaldulenses*. In the introduction of that work Landino tells us that having set out one day from Borgo with his brother Piero to visit Camaldoli, they found Lorenzo and Giuliano de'

Medici there before them with Alamanni Rinuccini and Piero and Donato Acciajuoli. "Presently Leon Battista Alberti arrived also with Marsilio Ficino and the Abbot of Camaldoli. Having introduced each to other, a discussion began which was continued through the summer days to the pleasure of all and of us who came after."

Borgo alla Collina is a delicious place, but it has little in the way of works of art to show the visitor. Yet in the chapel, originally part of the Castello, there is a triptych, a Madonna and Child enthroned and five saints by the so-called "Maestro del Bambino Vispo," wrongly ascribed to Parri di Spinello. It is dated 1323. The church is modern and possesses nothing but a mutilated altar-piece which can claim to be old. The chief attraction of Borgo lies in the views it affords of the beautiful strange valley, in the walks it offers you through its delightful countryside, and the excellent centre it proves to be for the exploration of the hills and valleys here to the west of Arno. Cool and delicious among its chestnut woods, and never without the sound of water, for the hill on which it stands has the Arno upon one side and the Solano on the other, Borgo alla Collina is as delightful a retreat as one could wish for.

In the valley of the Strada two places are worth a visit, indeed, they should on no account be missed, Castel S. Niccolò and Strada.

Castel S. Niccolò, which still keeps the tragic tower of its ruined castle, where Galeotto Novello



played the wild beast and where, in 1440, Count Francesco of Poppi, together with the Condottiere Piccinino, after besieging the place for two days, took it by storm. And when Francesco got in he killed with his own sword almost the only survivor, an old woman, before the eyes of her son, on her refusing to give up the keys. The place to-day is interesting because neglect has spared us so much of the old character of the castle that here, better than at Poppi even, we may understand what these Guidi fortresses were, their strength as in the keep here, their beauty as in the ruined chapel with its fading frescoes of saints, their stony paths and passages and brutal dwellings.

Strada, under this tragic castle, has in its own way not less to give us. A flourishing little place, it boasts still of a fine old Romanesque Pieve which, though spoiled by additions and rebuildings, is worth some trouble to see, because it is complete.

From Borgo alla Collina or Strada it is possible to visit two places, rather difficult of approach, lying upon the western hills of Casentino, the Pratomagno range. These are Cetica and Montemignaio. Cetica is but a village, but it boasts of three churches, and one of them, S. Maria, possesses a fine trecento triptych of the Madonna and Child with Saints, a delicious gold-backed altarpiece; and S. Michele, too, has a treasure in a fifteenth-century panel of the Madonna and Child. The little place has nothing else but its own beauty and coolness to recommend it.

Montemignaio, on the other hand, is full of marvels. To begin with, its situation is magnificent and then, beside its castle of Guido Novello with its huge tower and walls, a huge stone vaulted chamber, upheld by a single great pillar; in the Pieve below we have another of those Romanesque churches of which that at Borgo is the finest. This, beside its own interest and solemnity, possesses a polychrome terra-cotta altar-piece of the school of Giovanni della Robbia in which we see the Madonna and Child with SS. Anthony and Sebastian, and in the predella S. Francis receiving the Stigmata, and the Pietà, and S. Jerome in the wilderness.

One returns from these lonely places in the long summer days with a sort of regret; for all that Poppi awaits one in the valley and the eastern woods hold Camaldoli, the eastern heights La Verna.

### III

#### POPPI, CAMPALDINO, AND CAMALDOLI

THE WAY TO POPPI FROM BORGO ALLA COLLINA is delightful, beside Arno all the way. One passes by the field of Campaldino, of which I shall speak later, and the Franciscan convent of Certomondo, founded in 1262 by Guido Novello and Simone di Battifolle in thanksgiving, it is said, for the Ghibelline victory of Montaperto. In spite of terrible restorations the church still keeps its frescoes. There we see the Madonna and Child between two saints, a vast work of the trecento, and opposite to it another large fresco of S. Francis in glory with three figures of Poverty, Chastity, and Obedience above him, while below on the left kneel S. Chiara and S. Bernardino with Pope Innocent III and the Lady Jacoba. Behind the altar is a charming Annunciation by Neri di Bicci. It was probably to this church and its buildings that the wounded and dying were brought from the battlefield of Campaldino in the plain below (1289).

Above Certomondo, on the first eastern hills, stands Porrena, a charming village, well worth a visit where, in the parish church, is a fine relief of the Robbia school in which we see La Madonna della Cintola, the Madonna giving her girdle to



*The Bosco di Camaldoli*



S. Thomas. But Poppi calls us all along the road.

Poppi stands wonderfully on its hill on the other side by Arno, the right bank, and is reached still by the old bridge built by Guidoguerra. The borgo on the left bank, Ponte a Poppi, though old has little beauty or interest, and indeed Poppi itself looks so fine one is eager to neglect anything which prevents one in reaching it. Unfortunately, Poppi appears from afar much finer than on closer acquaintance she proves to be. The castle, however, once the strongest fortress in all this valley and still by far the most complete, will disappoint no one. It stands gloriously visible through the whole valley, dominating all the rest, and draws the eyes from every hill-top. Its builders were the two brothers Guido Novello and Simone di Battifolle, the former of whom, when he was governor of Florence, looted the city of arms to furnish the castle which, when the spoil of Montaperto was added to it, must have been the best provided castle in Tuscany. Florence, however, as Count Tegrimo of Porciano told Guido, "lent at a heavy interest." In 1290, after Campaldino, she wasted the lands of Guido and "broke the fortress of Poppi, strong and wonderful though it was." It was Guido of Battifolle, son of Simone, who rebuilt it, even obtaining a grant from Florence, for he was a Guelf, to enable him to do this. In its noble aspect, its haggard beauty and pride, it is curiously like its daughter, the Palazzo Vecchio

of Florence, but its situation helps it amazingly. It is finer, however, without than within, where it has been allowed to fall into so great decay that large restorations have been necessary. One enters the cortile across the filled moat under the postern tower, and sees at once the ruin and decay. Here were the prisons. But the whole castle was, on occasions, just that, as when the Duke of Athens was held here by the Count and forced to abdicate his government of the city of Florence. The noblest thing left here is the staircase hung with old *stemma*, but this is later than the castle itself. The old frescoes are gone, only a vast shadowy ghost here and there being left of them, and the flags are green with damp, the walls crumbling, the whole place empty and deserted.

At the top of the staircase is a huge statue of Guido di Battifolle, so they say, and here one enters a series of noble chambers with better preserved remains of their decorations, which for the most part date from the sixteenth century. In the chapel, however, are still the trecento frescoes attributed to Jacopo del Casentino who was born at Pratovecchio. There we see scenes from the life of the two saints John and of the Blessed Virgin.

There is but one church at Poppi which must be visited, and that lies beneath the castle. It possesses a Nativity, a relief of the Robbia school, a pleasing but undistinguished work, and a very fine Tuscan Dugento picture of the Madonna and Child, a work of the second half of the thirteenth century,

a large panel painted in tempera. In the convent of the Augustinian nuns there is a Nativity, an altar-piece with SS. Francis and Anthony of Padua with a predella in which we have the Life of the Virgin Mary. This is a work in glazed terra-cotta by the school of Giovanni della Robbia. Though slightly damaged it is well worth seeing. In the Church of the Badia is a fine Madonna and Child of the Tuscan school of the second half of the thirteenth century, according to Mr. F. Mason Perkins.

But in Poppi, I think, after the first astonishment and wonder of the castle has passed, one's thoughts turn continually away from the town to the green fields and vineyards and corn lands beneath it beside Arno, where the great battle, which, in truth, decided the fate of the whole valley, was fought and won by Florence. This was the battle of Campaldino, fought in the month of June 1289, of which Villani gives so vivid an account. "In the said year, 1289," he tells us, "a host was straight-way gathered against the city of Arezzo by reason of outrages received from the Aretines, and the banners of war—on behalf of Florence—were given out on the 12th day of May, and the royal (Naples) standard was borne by M. Gherardo Ventraia de' Tornaquinci; and so soon as they were given to them they bore them to the Abbey at Ripoli, as was their wont, and there they left them under guard, making as though they would march by that road upon the city of Arezzo, and



all the allies being come and the host being ordered by secret counsel, they purposed to depart by the way of Casentino, and suddenly, the 2nd day of June, the bells sounding a tolling, the ever prosperous host of the Florentines set forth and held the way of Pontassieve, and encamped to await the gathering of forces on Monte al Pruno; and there were assembled 1,600 horse and 10,000 foot, whereof 600 were citizens with their horses, the best armed and mounted which ever sallied forth from Florence; and 400 mercenaries, together with the following of the Captain M. Amerigo in the pay of the Florentines; and of Lucca there were 150 horsemen; and of Prato, 40 horsemen and foot soldiers; of Pistoja, 60 horse and foot; and of Siena, 120 horse; and of Volterra, 40 horse; and of Bologna, their ambassadors with their company, and of Samminiato, and of San Gimignano, and of Colle, men mounted and on foot from each place; and Maghinardo of Susinana, a good and wise captain in war, with his Romagnoli. And the said host being assembled they descended into the plain of Casentino, devastating the places of Count Guido Novello, who was Podestà of Arezzo. Hearing this, the Bishop of Arezzo, with the other captains of the Ghibelline party (for there were many men of name amongst them) determined to come with all their host to Bibbiena, to the end it might not be destroyed; and they were 800 horse and 8,000 foot, very fine men; and many wise captains of war

were among them, for they were the flower of the Ghibellines of Tuscany, of the March, and of the Duchy and of Romagna; and all were men experienced in arms and in war; and they desired to give battle to the Florentines, having no fear, albeit the Florentines were two horsemen to one against them; but they despised them, saying that they adorned themselves like women and combed their tresses; and they derided them and held them for nought. Truly there was further cause why the Aretines should declare battle against the Florentines, albeit their horsemen were two to one against them; for they were in fear of a plot which the Bishop of Arezzo had set on foot with the Florentines and conducted by M. Marsilio de' Vecchietti to give over to the Florentines Bibbiena, Civitella and all the castles of his see, and he to have 5,000 golden florins each year of his life, in the security of the company of the Cerchi. The progress of the plot was interrupted by M. Guglielmino Pazzo, his nephew, to the end the bishop might not be slain by the Ghibelline leaders; and therefore they hastened the battle and took thither the said bishop, where he was left dead together with the rest; and thus was the bishop punished for his treason, who, at the same time, sought to betray both the Florentines and his own Aretines. And the Florentines, having joyfully received the gage of battle, arrayed themselves; and the two hosts stood over against one another, after more ordered fashion, both on one side and

on the other, than ever in any battle before in Italy, in the plain at the foot of Poppi, in the region of Certomondo, for such is the name of the place, and of a church of the Franciscans which is near there, and in a plain which is called Campaldino; and this was a Saturday morning the 11th day of June, the day of S. Barnabas the Apostle. M. Amerigo and the other Florentine captains drew up in well-ordered troops and enrolled 150 fore-fighters of the best of the host, among which were twenty new-made knights, who then received their spurs; and M. Vieri de' Cerchi, being among the captains and being lame in the leg, would not therefore desist from being among the fore-fighters; and since it fell to him to make the selection for his *sesto*, he would not lay this service upon any who did not desire to be chosen, but chose himself and his son and nephews; the which thing was counted to him as of great merit; and for his good example and for shame many other noble citizens offered themselves as fore-fighters. And this done they flanked them on either side by troops of light-armed infantry, and crossbowmen and unmounted lancers. Then behind the fore-fighters came the main body flanked, in its turn, by footmen and behind all the baggage so collected as to close up the rear of the main body, outside of which were stationed two hundred horse and foot of the Lucchese and Pistoians and other foreigners, whereof was captain M. Corso Donati, which then was Podestà of Pistoia; and their orders were to

take the enemy in flank should occasion arise. The Aretines, on their part, ordered their troops wisely, inasmuch as there were, as we have said, good captains of war amongst them, and they appointed many fore-fighters to the number of three hundred, among which were chosen twelve of the chief leaders, who were called the Twelve Paladins. And each side having given a war-cry to their host, the Florentines, 'Ho, Knights, Nerbona,' and the Aretines, 'Ho, Knights, San Donato,' the fore-fighters of the Aretines advanced with great courage and struck spur to smite into the Florentine host; and the rest of their troops followed after save that Count Guido Novello, which was with a troop of one hundred and fifty horse to charge in flank, did not adventure himself into the battle, but drew back and then fled to his castle, and the movement and assault made upon the Florentines by the Aretines who esteemed themselves to be valiant men-at-arms was to the end that by their bold attack they might break up the Florentines at the first onset and put them to flight; and the shock was so great that most of the Florentine fore-fighters were unhorsed, and the main body was driven backward a good space, but they were not therefore confounded nor broken up but received the enemy with constancy and fortitude, and the wings of infantry on either side, keeping their ranks well, enclosed the enemy and there was hard fighting for a good space. And M. Corso Donati, who was apart with the

men of Lucca and Pistoia, and had been commanded to stand firm and not to strike under pain of death, when he saw the battle begun, said like a valiant man: 'If we lose, I will die in the battle with my fellow citizens; and, if we conquer, let him that will, come to us at Pistoia to exact the penalty'; and he boldly set his troop in motion and struck the enemy in the flank and was a great cause of their rout. And this done, as it pleased God, the Florentines had the victory and the Aretines were routed and discomfited, and between horse and foot more than 1,700 were slain, and more than 2,000 taken whereof many of the best were smuggled away, some for friendship, some in return for ransom; but there came bound to Florence more than 740, and there died Buonconte, son of Count Guido of Montefeltro, and there was great gladness and rejoicing in Florence, with good cause for, at the said discomfiture, were slain many captains and valiant men of the Ghibelline party and enemies of the commonwealth of Florence, and there were brought low the arrogance and pride, not only of the Aretines, but of the whole Ghibelline party and of the Empire."

Such was the famous battle of Campaldino, fought on the fields between Poppi and Certomondo, in 1289. In the ranks of the victors stood the youthful Dante, and the battle, the first he had seen, impressed him, and one tragic episode of it he has introduced into the *Purgatorio*. This is the flight and death of the young Buonconte da

Montefeltro, a famous Ghibelline. His end was a mystery, but Dante meets him there upon the Mount of Purgatory and hears his story:

“ I am Buonconte, Montefeltro I ;  
 Giovanna nor none else have care for me ;  
 Sorrowing with these I therefore go.” I thus :  
 “ From Campaldino’s field what force or chance  
 Drew thee, that ne’er thy sepulture was known ? ”  
 “ Oh,” answered he, “ at Casentino’s foot  
 A stream there courseth, named Archiano, sprung  
 In Apennine above the hermit’s seat.  
 E’en where its name is cancelled, there came I,  
 Pierced in the throat, fleeing away on foot  
 And bloodying the plain. Here sight and speech  
 Failed me ; and finishing with Mary’s name  
 I fell, and tenantless my flesh remained.  
 I will report the truth, which thou again  
 Tell to the living. Me God’s angel took  
 Whilst he of Hell exclaimed : ‘ O thou from heaven,  
 Say wherefore hast thou robbed me ? Thou of him  
 The eternal portion bear’st with thee away,  
 For one poor tear that he deprives me of,  
 But of the other, other rule I make.’  
 “ Thou know’st how in the atmosphere collects  
 That vapour dank, returning into water  
 Soon as it mounts where cold condenses it.  
 That evil will, which in his intellect  
 Still follows evil, came, and raised the wind  
 And smoky mist, by virtue of the power  
 Given by his nature. Thence the valley, soon  
 As day was spent, he carried o’er with cloud  
 From Pratomagno to the mountain range,  
 And stretch’d the sky above ; so that the air  
 Impregnate changed to water. Fell the rain ;  
 And to the fosses came all that the land  
 Contained not ; and as mightiest streams are wont,

## THE VALLEY OF ARNO

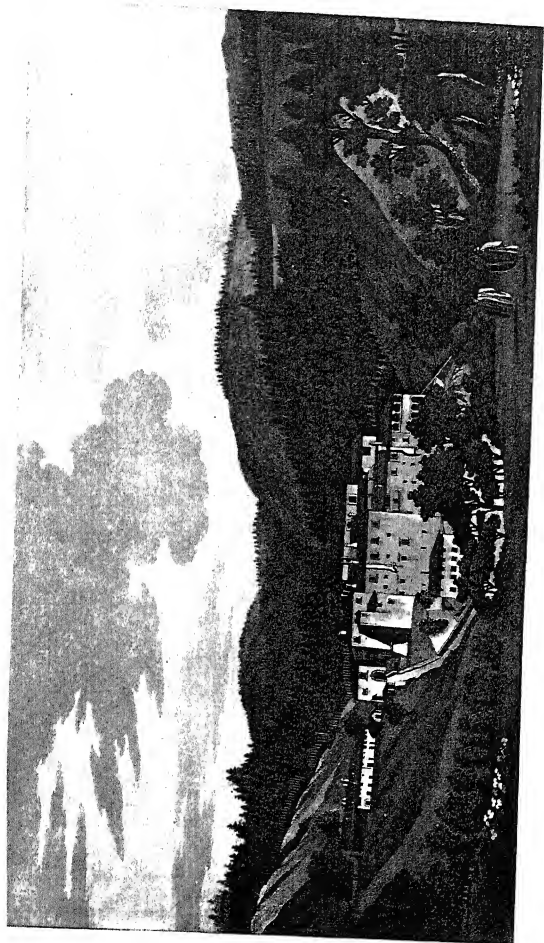
To the great river, with such headlong sweep,  
Rush'd that nought stay'd its course. My stiffened frame  
Laid at his mouth, the fell Archiano found,  
And dash'd it into Arno; from my breast  
Loosening the cross that of myself I made  
When overcome with pain. He hurled me on  
Along the banks and bottom of his course;  
Then in his muddy spoils encircling wrapt."

We may see the very spot where Buonconte died thus bleeding to death among the rushes just before we come to Bibbiena, below Poppi, where the Archiano comes into the greater stream.

Before going on thus down stream from Poppi, however, there remains one famous place to be visited, spoiled though it be. I mean that "hermit's seat" of which Dante speaks—Camaldoli.

Camaldoli lies two hours or more above Poppi to the north-east on the western side of the central Apennine, near 3,000 feet above the sea. The way to it is delicious and itself sufficient reward for the steepness and fatigue of it, but the place itself is so delightful that it beggars even the loveliness of the way.

For Camaldoli is not a town or even a village, it is just a vast monastery church and guest house, now an hotel all contrived in one vast naked building. The monks still dwell in their monastery for which they now pay rent to the Italian Government, so that happily things are not so bad as they might be here, bad as they are. And then high up through the great pine forests, an hour's climb above the monastery, in an almost inaccessible and



*Camaldoli*





most noble situation, stands the Sacro Eremo, near 4,000 feet above the sea, where each in his cell still live the hermits of whom Dante speaks.

But what are these monks and hermits? They are the monks and hermits of the Order of Camaldoli, the second reform of the Benedictine Order founded by S. Romuald in or about the year 1012. S. Romuald came of the noble family of the Onesti of Ravenna. He began his career as a Benedictine monk, but all the houses over which he came to rule found his way too hard for them, so in 1012, with five companions, he came over the mountains to the lonely and inaccessible spot where his hermits still live, and there founded, upon land given him by Count Maldolo of Arezzo, a hermitage where each hermit lived in a separate dwelling, the whole settlement being surrounded by an enclosing wall out of which none might go. The Rule he gave them was hard: they had to keep two long Lents in the year, never to taste meat, and their business and their pleasure was to recite the Divine Office. Yet for some this was not enough. From the first certain among them chose and were permitted to live entirely enclosed in their cells which they never left even to eat or to hear Mass or recite Vespers. If the recluse, for so they were called, was a priest, he said his Mass in his cell and was answered from a little room adjoining. And this endured until our own time, though to-day it is ended, for there are no more

recluses at Camaldoli, though their cells may still be seen.<sup>1</sup>

Such was the first institution of the Order of Camaldoli, and such were its religious.

The monastery below was a later foundation; here there were monks, not hermits. They followed the same rule but were not isolated nor confined. In spite of its suppression in 1866, as I say, the Order endures and some few monks remain here at the mother house. To-day it consists of five congregations. The Holy Hermitage, Sacro Eremo at Camaldoli; the Congregation of Paris; the Congregation of Turin; the ancient convent of S. Michele at Murano, near Venice; and Monte Corona at Perugia. Of these the Murano congregation no longer belongs to the Order.

The habit, as you soon learn at Camaldoli, is white with a white scapular, the hood drawn over the head. Out of doors the monks wear a cloak with a small hood. The monks are clean-shaven, but the hermits and lay brethren wear beards, and the latter use great shady hats of straw out of doors at work. The church (Chiesa Maggiore) possesses a fine altar-piece in blue and white terra-cotta of the Madonna and Child crowned by two angels between four saints, an early work of Giovanni della Robbia. Here, too, is a delicate marble relief of the Madonna and Child by some

<sup>1</sup> The name Camaldoli is said to be derived from Casa-di-Maldolo, after the generous giver of the land and villa.

Florentine sculptor influenced by Mino da Fiesole and Desiderio da Settignano.

To visit such a place is more than a pleasure, it is an inspiration in happiness, a memory to treasure, not of something tragic or sad, but of a profound gaiety, a service if you will, but light-hearted and full of delight. Over the tragedy of the Valley Enclosed, with its broken castles and battlefields, its hatred and pride and revenge, there stands still, on guard as it were over all that stillness, this peace and grace and happiness of heart. For where hatred has failed and is dead, love triumphs, and where cruelty and war are forgotten this peace is remembered. And for this let us rejoice.

#### IV

### BIBBIENA AND LA VERNA

ONE COMES DOWN FROM POPPI INTO BIBBIENA, past the scene of Buonconte's death where Archiano meets Arno, expecting much; one finds little. Bibbiena itself has less to show than Poppi. It is just a little Tuscan hill city possessing some fine Renaissance palaces, with a windy towered Piazza in which a great fountain plays and all about tall cypresses stand very still and dark in the sun among the vineyards and the corn. Yet small and rude as it seems no one need fear to stay there nor even to arrive late in the evening, for the Albergo Amadori is delightful, the host obliging and cheerful and entirely at your service, and you may eat there with humanity and sleep in cleanly comfort. Famous as the birthplace of that Cardinal Bibbiena who was one of the greatest ornaments of the court of Urbino in the sixteenth century, the little town to-day, though it still boasts of two fine early works, a Nativity and a Deposition, by Giovanni della Robbia in the Franciscan church of San Lorenzo and a picture of the Madonna and Child with SS. Ippolito, John Baptist, James, and Christopher by Bicci di Lorenzo and, far more important and lovely, a Madonna and Child of

the early fifteenth century which Mr. F. Mason Perkins gives to Arcangelo di Cola, in S. Ippolito, is known to the traveller, if at all, as the base for the journey, best afoot but possible by carriage, to the Franciscan convent of La Verna on the summit of the mountains, four thousand one hundred and seventy feet above the sea where, in the year 1224, S. Francis, the little poor man of Assisi, received in his hands and feet and side the Stigmata, the wounds of his Crucified Lord.

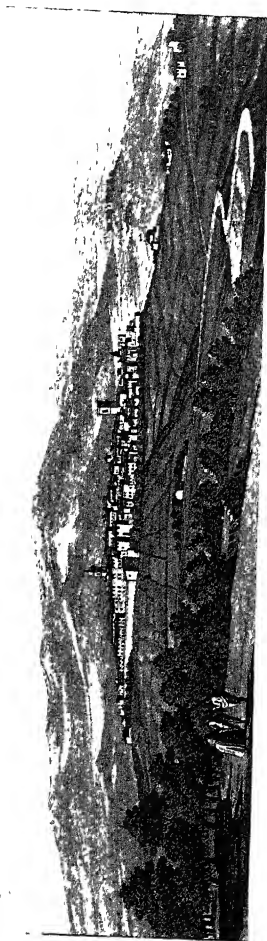
About a kilometre beyond Bibbiena on the banks of the Vessa, on the road to La Verna, is the church of S. Maria del Sasso. This is an imposing Renaissance building with large cloisters built by a follower of Brunelleschi, possibly Bartolommeo Baccelli of Settignano. Here is a miraculous picture of the Madonna with tabernacle by Bicci di Lorenzo. The other pictures consist of a Head of Christ and a fresco of the Annunciation by Francesco Brina, a follower of Andrea del Sarto; a large Assumption, designed by Fra Bartolommeo, and other later works. The choir stalls are fine and the church is well worth a visit.

The way from Bibbiena to La Verna, that sacred spot—sacred if for no other cause yet for this, that it was loved by S. Francis who there suffered his passion—is difficult and not very lovely. It is a climb of three hours by carriage and about the same afoot from the little town in the valley to the point in the mountains where the road ceases, whence rises the strange rock upon

which the convent stands, set with cypress and with fir, with birch and oak, and backed by the still far away great hills. I suppose it is a walk of less than half an hour, in air like wine and under a sky which only Italy knows, from the lonely and stony place where the road comes to an end at the foot of that great rock—*Mons in quo beneplacitum est Deo habitare in eo*—to the convent on its summit.

Once arrived there the traveller need have no more fear of his reception than at Bibbiena. If of the male sex he will receive a hearty and delighted welcome from the friars, and a bed, even a separate room, will be found for him within the convent; if a woman, sleeping accommodation will be prepared in the guest house at the foot of the rock where the road comes to an end; but all, men and women together, will sup in the convent, where, if the food is simple, it is wholesome and appetizing and served by the humble and cheerful sons of S. Francis who, since he taught them himself, know the true source of "perfect joy." For all the kindly hospitality and courtesy the traveller receives in this wild and desolate place no payment is asked, but no guest would think of leaving this convent where, as a stranger, he has been so bountifully and lovingly received without making an offering, and that as large as he can afford.

I say the mountain is wild and desolate; indeed, nothing more strange or more lonely is to be found



*Bibbiena*





in Tuscany than Monte La Verna, a mountain upon a mountain, capped, as it were, by that mighty perpendicular rock upon which the convent stands:

*Il crudo sasso infra Tevere ed Arno.*

Indeed, La Verna is just that, a vast naked rock crowned with beeches and firs thrown up four thousand feet into the sky between the valley of the Arno and the valley of the Tiber. To M. Sabatier this strange summit seems like the ark of Noah, the ark of Noah petrified upon Mount Ararat. Mr. Montgomery Carmichael likens it to an heraldic monster blazoned against the heaven's azure. It is indeed like a sign in the sky so strange that I can only compare it with the bizarre ruin of Radicofani seen against the southern heavens as you come up out of Tuscany by the Via Francigena into the Patrimony. But the ruins made with mortal hands, the litter, the strange summit of Radicofani, are as nothing to the appalling boulders that nature has strewn upon the top of La Verna, amid which, as though placed there from on high, the little Franciscan convent rests in silence and in peace. It is as though the place had been a battlefield of armies greater and more splendid than any we may know, and such is the awful confusion of the rocks that one is ready to accept the revelation made to S. Francis that the debris we see was caused by the earthquake which shook the world when Christ died upon Calvary.

It was in the midst of this appalling desolation that in September 1224 "on a morning about the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross [Sept. 14] while he was praying on the side of the mountain that is called La Verna . . . S. Francis received in his flesh the marks of the Stigmata of Our Lord Jesus Christ."

According to the beautiful narrative of the *Fioretti*, that "fifth gospel" as it has been well called, it was in the year 1224, in which he received the Stigmata, that S. Francis was given as a free gift this lonely mountain of La Verna by a "great and wealthy gentleman of Tuscany called Orlando (Cattani) da Chiusi di Casentino." The gift, however, really belongs to the year 1213, when the Franciscan Order was four years old and S. Francis himself thirty-one. Orlando, it seems, had been "greatly touched in the heart by God through the marvellous preaching of Saint Francis," indeed, he heard him "as it were an angel speaking," so that he desired to speak with him, and after he said, "I have in Tuscany a mountain most proper for devotion the which is called the Monte La Verna and is very lonely and right well fitted for whoso may wish to do penance in a place remote from men or whoso may desire to live a solitary life; if it should please thee, right willingly would I give it to thee and thy companions for the salvation of my soul."

S. Francis gratefully received this gift and sent two of his friars to take possession of it. They

went with fifty men at arms sent by Orlando, so greatly was the country infested with robbers, and there "they chose out a place for him and for S. Francis to dwell therein and with the help of the men-at-arms that bore them company they made a little cell of branches of trees; . . . and departed and returned to S. Francis."

Two years later S. Francis visited La Verna, that "secret place" for the first time. Five times more he was to withdraw himself there, the last time in September 1224 to receive the wounds of Our Lord.

It was to keep the Lent of S. Michael that in 1224, being forty-three years old, S. Francis withdrew himself from the world and set out from S. Mary of the Angels at Assisi to go up into La Verna with three of his friars, Brother Masseo da Marignano, Brother Angelo Tancredi da Rieti, and Brother Leo, a man of exceeding great simplicity and purity, for the which cause S. Francis loved him much. It was a hard journey of three days. The first night was spent "in a house of the friars," but the second "by reason of the bad weather and because they were tired, not being able to reach any house of the brethren nor any walled town or village when the night overtook them and bad weather, they took refuge in a deserted and dismantled church and there laid them down to rest."

It was August, the vineyards were all purple with grapes, the ways still full of heat when they

set out, and then, as often happens suddenly and without warning, the summer broke and the first winter rain deluged the iron earth, turning the roads into rivers and the rivers into impassable torrents. For all that in the poor shelter of the ruined church S. Francis, weary as he must have been, for he was already ailing, did not rest, but spent the night in prayer, so that in the morning he was too ill and feeble in body to go on afoot. His three companions, therefore, went to a poor peasant hard by and "begged him for the love of God to lend his ass for Brother Francis their Father that could not go afoot. Hearing them make mention of Brother Francis, he asked them: 'Are ye of the brethren of the Brother of Assisi, of whom so much good is spoken?' The brothers answered 'Yes,' and that in very truth it was for him that they asked for the sumpter beast. Then the good man, with great diligence and devotion, made ready the ass and brought it to S. Francis, and with great reverence let him mount thereon, and they went on their way, and he with them behind his ass. And when they had gone on a little way, the peasant said to S. Francis, 'Tell me, art thou Brother Francis of Assisi?' Replied S. Francis, 'Yes.' 'Try, then,' said the peasant, 'to be as good as thou art by all folk held to be, seeing that many have great faith in thee; and therefore I admonish thee, that in thee there be naught save what men hope to find therein.' Hearing these words, S. Francis thought no scorn

to be admonished by a peasant, and said not within himself, 'What beast is this doth admonish me?' as many would say nowadays that wear the habit, but straightway threw himself from off the ass upon the ground, and kneeled down before him and kissed his feet, and then humbly thanked him for that he had deigned thus lovingly to admonish him. Then the peasant, together with the companions of S. Francis, with great devotion lifted him from the ground and set him on the ass again, and they went on their way. . . . As they drew near to the foot of the rock of La Verna itself, it pleased S. Francis to rest a little under the oak that was by the way, and is there to this day; and as he stood under it, S. Francis began to take note of the situation of the place and the country around. And as he was thus gazing, lo! there came a great multitude of birds from divers parts, the which, with singing and flapping of their wings, all showed joy and gladness exceeding great, and came about S. Francis in such fashion, some settled on his head, some on his shoulders, and some on his arms, some in his lap and some round his feet. When his companions and the peasant marvelled, beholding this, S. Francis, all joyful in spirit, spake thus unto them: 'I believe, brethren most dear, that it is pleasing unto our Lord Jesus Christ that we should dwell in this lonely mountain, seeing that our little sisters and brothers, the birds show such joy at our coming.' So they went on their way and came to the place the companions had first chosen."

So according to the divine narrative of the *Fioretti* S. Francis came for the last time to Monte La Verna in the August of 1224 with his three friends. But it seems that his usual place of abiding there, the little hut built by the two friars with the assistance of the men-at-arms of Orlando Cattani, was no longer "solitary and secret" enough for S. Francis. And so just before the Feast of the Assumption on 15th August he set out with Brother Leo and presently "they found on the side of the mountain that looked towards the south, a lonely place and very proper for his purpose; but they could not win there; because in front there was a horrible and fearful cleft in a huge rock; wherefore with great pains they laid a piece of wood over it as a bridge and got across to the other side." There the brothers made a little cell for him "so that no cry of his could be heard by them." And when this was done he sent them all back to the hut; only Brother Leo, once a day, was allowed to bring him a little bread and a little water, and at night, at the hour of Matins, to come to the bridge-head and cry out the first words of the office, "Domine, labia mea aperies"—"O Lord, open thou my lips"—and if S. Francis answered him then should they say Matins together, but if not he was to return straightway. So S. Francis proposed to keep the Lent of S. Michael which began upon the morrow of the Feast of the Assumption (16th August-28th September). During these forty days S.

Francis, as the writer of the *Fioretti* tells us, was tempted by Satan even as was our Lord in the desert. But "God who suffereth not His servants to be tempted above that they are able to bear," saved him out of the hands of the demon who would have cast him down from that terrible place and "gave him much consolation not only through the visits of angels but also through the birds of the wood. For during all the time of that fast, a falcon that was building her nest hard by his cell, awoke him every night a little before Matins with her singing and the beating of her wings against the cell. . . . And when perchance S. Francis was too weary or weak, this falcon, like a discreet person and pitiful, would sing her song later . . . and beyond all this she would sometimes in the daytime sit quite tamely by him." And the angels made him music.

But there came a morning when, out of the darkness, S. Francis did not answer Brother Leo's greeting. It was the morning of the 14th September, and "certain shepherds keeping watch in those parts, seeing the mountains aflame and all the mountains and villages round lit up, were sore afraid. And in like manner at the bright shining of this light which through the windows lit up the hostels of the country road, certain muleteers that were going into Romagna arose believing that the day had dawned, and saddled and laded their beasts; and going on their way they saw the said light die out and the material sun arise." That



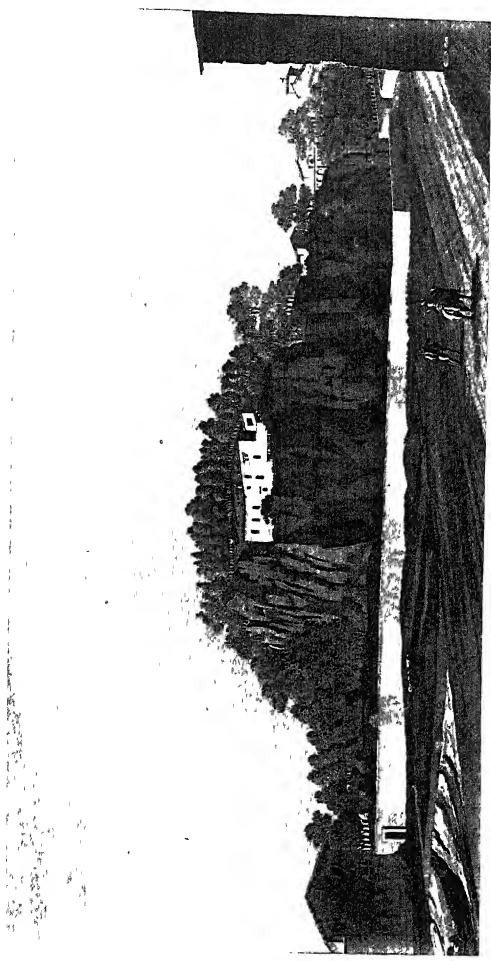
light came from heaven, for S. Francis on that night was rapt in God, while Brother Leo, unseen, watched him as he knelt in prayer, and “on that morn he saw descend from heaven a seraph with six wings resplendent and aflame, and as with swift flight the seraph drew nigh unto S. Francis so that he could discern him, he clearly saw that he bore in him the image of a man crucified; and his wings were in such guise displayed that two wings were spread above his head and two were spread out to fly and other two covered all his body. Seeing this S. Francis was sore adread and was filled at once with joy and grief and marvel. He felt glad at the gracious look of Christ, who appeared to him so lovingly and gazed on him so graciously, but on the other hand seeing Him crucified upon the cross he felt unendurable grief for pity’s sake. . . . Then Christ spake to S. Francis certain high and secret things, the which S. Francis in his lifetime desired not to reveal to any man; but after his life was done he did reveal them as it is set forth below; and the words were these: ‘Knowest thou,’ said Christ, ‘what it is that I have done unto thee? I have given thee the Stigmata that are the signs of My Passion, to the end that thou mayst be My standard-bearer. And even as in the day of My death I descended into hell and brought out thence all souls that I found there by reason of these My Stigmata; even so do I grant to thee that every year on the day of thy death thou shalt go to Purgatory, and in virtue

of thy Stigmata shalt bring out thence all the souls of thy three orders,—to wit, Minors, Sisters, Continents,—and likewise others that shall have had a great devotion for thee, and shalt lead them unto the glory of Paradise, to the end that thou mayest be confirmed to Me in death as thou art in life.’ Then this marvellous image vanished away, and left in the heart of S. Francis a burning ardour and flame of love divine, and in his flesh a marvellous image and copy of the Passion of Christ. For straightway in the hands and feet of S. Francis began to appear the marks of the nails in such wise as he had seen them in the body of Jesus Christ the crucified, the which had shown Himself to him in the likeness of a Seraph; and thus his hands and feet appeared to be pierced through the middle with nails, and the heads of them were in the palms of his hands and the soles of his feet, outside the flesh, and their points came out in the back of his hands and of his feet, so that they seemed bent back and riveted in such a fashion that under the bend and riveting, which all stood out above the flesh, might easily be put a finger of the hand as a ring; and the heads of the nails were round and black. Likewise in the right side appeared the image of a wound made by a lance, unhealed, and red and bleeding, the which afterwards oftentimes dropped blood from the sacred breast of S. Francis, and stained with blood his tunic and his hose. Wherefore his companions, before they knew it of his own lips, perceiving

nevertheless that he uncovered not his hands and feet, and that he could not put the soles of his feet to the ground . . . knew of a surety that in his hands and feet, and likewise in his side, he bore the express image and similitude of our Lord Jesus Christ crucified."

Upon the Feast of S. Michael the Archangel S. Francis, with Brother Leo, took leave of Brother Masseo and Brother Angelo. And "yielding to their prayers he stretched out to them his most holy hands adorned with those glorious and sacred Stigmata to see, to touch, and kiss; and so leaving them comforted he departed from them and went down from the holy mountain." He returned to S. Mary of the Angels at Assisi, where just two years and twenty days after that sacred and wonderful night in La Verna he was to die, upon 4th October 1226.

Thus S. Francis received the Stigmata of Christ upon Monte La Verna, which ever since has been famous as one of the most sacred places in Italy. The amazing fact has been disputed and even denied, but the evidence is too strong even for M. Paul Sabatier. "*Les témoignages*," he writes, "*m' ont paru à la fois trop nombreux et trop précis pour ne pas entraîner la conviction.*" The Stigmata cannot be denied, so the modern world has set itself the task of explaining them, of explaining them away. They are said by the cynic to have been self-inflicted, by the physiologist to have been the result of auto-suggestion. But I do



*La Verna*



not think questions of that sort need worry, or ever do worry, any acceptable traveller who makes his way in the Tuscan summer days up to La Verna.

Such a traveller first comes, at the foot of the great rock which is the precipitous summit of La Verna, to the *Cappella degli Uccelli* in the place where, as the *Fioretti* tells us, the birds came to welcome S. Francis as he rested under an oak by the way before he began, weak as he was, the final ascent. Climbing, even as he, thence to the convent, we enter the quadrangle, by a low arched gateway, over which is carved the words *Non est in toto sanctior orbe mons*, and see before us the great rude buildings low and a little confused of the convent itself, dating from the end of the fifteenth century. Here still dwell about a hundred friars, for unlike S. Francesco at Assisi and S. Maria degli Angeli, the convent of La Verna escaped the suppression of 1866, by reason of the good offices of the Commune of Florence, the city successfully claiming the place against the Piedmontese. The only other house, I think, which escaped the rapacity of the new masters was the great Benedictine House of Monte Cassino, and that by the personal intervention of Mr. Gladstone.

Within the convent the first building we enter, led by a friar, is the Chiesina degli Angeli, built in 1216. This is that S. Maria degli Angeli to which S. Francis bade especially farewell, calling it by name when, as Brother Masseo tells us in his

letter, but as the *Fioretti* does not, he bade good-bye to "Monte La Verna, Mount of Angels."

S. Maria degli Angeli is said to have been built originally from a design furnished by the Blessed Virgin; S. Bonaventura enlarged it, but even so it is too small to accommodate the friars, being but thirty feet long and seventeen feet wide. The church is notable as the earliest building on the mountain, a place in which S. Francis himself has knelt and prayed and said his office, and as possessing even to-day more than one fine work of art; the glorious terra-cotta over the altar, the Madonna della Cintola, in which our Lady gives her girdle to S. Thomas, the work of Andrea della Robbia, and the two polychrome reliefs, the Nativity and the Deposition, from the hands of his pupils.

The little church of S. Mary of the Angels was too small for the great convent, and so beside it, in 1348, Tarlato, Conte di Pietramala and his wife, Giovanna, Contessa di Santa Fiora, built the great church which was completed by the Florentines in 1459, who decorated it with many glorious paintings, all of which seem to have disappeared before Vasari's day; among them were works by Taddeo Gaddi and Jacopo del Casentino. To-day there remains, however, a very lovely terra-cotta of the Annunciation by Andrea della Robbia in the Niccolini chapel, and another work in which we see the Madonna adoring her little Son, the principal figures of which are from Andrea's hand.

Here, too, over the first altar on the right is a fine work by Giovanni della Robbia—the Madonna del Refugio with S. Francis and S. Mary of Egypt on the left and S. Anthony and S. Onofrio on the right. Designed by the same hand and originally over the high altar, but now in the Cappella Ridolfi, is another Robbia work representing the Ascension. Upon either side of the high altar to-day we see a figure of S. Francis and S. Anthony, works of the Robbia school.

Close to S. Maria Maggiore stands the Cappella di Montedoglio. Within is a terra-cotta, a school work of the Robbia, representing the Deposition, a fine composition of eight figures in which we see S. Francis and S. Jerome, and in the predella the arms of Montedoglio in the midst and on either side the Nativity of Christ and the Adoration of the Magi.

We are led out of the Cappella di Montedoglio through a loggia from which we look into the *bosco*, a wonderful forest of ilex, through which we climb to the highest pinnacle whence all the mountains of Umbria, the Marches, and Romagna may be seen. The loggia is now covered and painted with poor frescoes of the life of S. Francis, but until the end of the sixteenth century it was open and in winter always deep in snow. It is said that one night, so cold was it and so deep the snow, that even the friars, half starved as they were, could not cross it to reach, as was their custom every night, the Chapel of the Stigmata upon the



farther side, where they were, and are, used to say Matins before dawn. In the morning, on all that way the snow was seen to have been trodden down by the feet of all sorts of birds and beasts, those brothers and sisters as S. Francis called them, that he had always loved so well.

The Cappella delle Stimmate was begun in 1263 by the famous Conte Simone di Battifolle, on that southern side of the mountain in the spot where S. Francis

Da Cristo prese l'ultimo sigillo  
Che la sue membra du' anni portarno.<sup>1</sup>

This is, of course, in the eyes of the friars, and surely for us too, the most sacred spot upon the sacred mountain, for here S. Francis, their father, the apostle of humanity, the little poor man of Assisi, was marked with the wounds of the Crucified. The spot where S. Francis knelt when he saw Our Lord and received those five rays as of light into his body, upon his feet and hands and in his side, is covered with a grating.

Over the entrance to the chapel is a school work of the Robbia—S. Francis receiving the Stigmata. Behind the arches is the beautiful Crucifixion with SS. Francis and Jerome of Andrea della Robbia, one of his most important works. Of old, according to Vasari, the chapel was entirely painted in fresco by Taddeo Gaddi and Jacopo del Casentino.

<sup>1</sup> Dante, *Paradiso*, xi, 107.

Close beside the Capella delle Stimmate is the little Cappella della Croce, in the "secret" place where stood the cell which the three companions made for S. Francis to keep that wonderful Lent of S. Michael in 1224. Two oratories should also be visited, that of S. Anthony of Padua in which the great thaumaturgist wrote his *Sermonario* and that of S. Bonaventure, where the Seraphic Doctor wrote the *Itinerarium Mentis*.

Nor should the traveller omit to see the *Sasso Spico*. This is a vast mass of rock overhanging the mountain side, reached by a little stairway. Beneath this S. Francis would often meditate. Close by is the bed of S. Francis, a bare rock covered now with an iron grill in an appalling chasm, and the precipice down which the devil, but for this intervention of God, would, as we are told in the *Fioretti*, have hurled the saint.

Before leaving the convent to go up to the great summit La Penna, there is one other chapel that must be seen. This is the Cappella della Maddalena, which marks the site of the little hut in which our Lord appeared to S. Francis and made him four promises with regard to his Order. "In the Mount of La Verna as S. Francis was speaking with Brother Leo, quoth S. Francis: 'Brother, little sheep, wash this stone with water.' Brother Leo was quick and washed the stone with water. Quoth S. Francis with great joy and gladness, 'Wash it with wine,' and so was it done. 'Wash it,' quoth S. Francis, 'with oil'; and

even so was it done. Quoth S. Francis: 'Brother little sheep, wash this stone with balsam.' Replied Brother Leo: 'O sweet father, how can I find balsam in so wild a place as this?' Replied S. Francis: 'Know brother, little sheep of Christ, that is the stone whereon Christ did sit when He appeared on a time to me here; and therefore have I said to thee four times, wash it, and keep silence; for Jesus Christ hath promised unto me four special graces for my Order. The first is that all they that shall love my Order with their whole heart, and the brothers that shall persevere, shall by the peace of God make a good end. The second is that the persecutors of this Order shall notably be punished. The third is that no wicked man shall be able to remain long in this Order if so be he continue in his wickedness. The fourth is that this Order shall endure even unto the Last Judgment.' " The stone upon which Christ sat when He made these promises to S. Francis is still used as the altar stone in this chapel. It was upon this stone that S. Francis wrote the famous blessing for Brother Leo and signed it with his own hand, using the cross tau. This is now conserved in the treasury of S. Francesco at Assisi.

From the convent one climbs up to La Penna, passing on the way the Oratorio del Beato Giovanni della Verna, a friar who died in 1322, and the Sasso di Lupo, the hiding-place of that robber called the Wolf by the countryside, whom S. Francis converted and named Brother Agnolo.

La Penna itself is marked by a chapel in which is a Crucifixion dated 1482 by some pupil of the Robbias, but the spectacle of the world as seen thence outfaces any work of art. Here, indeed, is the "bare rock" between Val d'Arno and Val di Tevere, both of which lie beneath in full view. Beyond, to the south, rise the Umbrian Hills, to the north the great Apennines, to the west the deep vale of the Casentino and the beauty of Falterona.

Alone there in all that stillness between earth and sky the heart is hushed for a moment, and one may consider in quietness the meaning of all these strange things that so many years ago in this place befell the son of the cloth merchant of Assisi; and yet not the son of the cloth merchant, but the Apostle of Humanity. That, after all, is the end of every contemplation of S. Francis's life; he loved us as no one but Christ has ever been able to do. He loved us, spent his whole life in our service, and not in ours only, but in the service of everything that has life. The birds and beasts are his sisters and brothers; even of the wolf, the old enemy of man, he makes a friend, to the sun he lifts up his voice, because he is glad of it, and to the water that sings as it goes he laughs in answer; he claims fire as his sister and for his brother he takes the death of the body. He loved everything, and not least or last this mountain of La Verna. For according to Brother Masseo, when S. Francis said farewell to the mountain for the last time upon 30th September 1224, Count Orlando

da Chiusi sent him an ass for he could not walk since his feet were pierced with nails. "In the morning after he had heard Mass in S. Maria degli Angeli, as was his custom, calling the brethren to him he commanded them by their obedience always to love one another, to watch and to pray and ever to care for that place and to say office there night and day. And again he commended unto them all the holy mountain, beseeching all his friars now and in time to come never to permit that place to be profaned but always to have it in reverence, and to all who should dwell there he gave his blessing, and to all who should pray there with humility and respect. But, said he, 'Let such as will not reverence this place be confounded and let God punish them.' To me, he said 'Brother Masseo, my will is that in this mountain those of my friars should dwell who fear God most, and therefore let the Superiors place here only the best of my friars. Ah! ah! ah! Brother Masseo, I say no more.'

"Then he bade me, Brother Masseo, Brother Angelo, Brother Silvestro, and Brother Illuminato to care especially for that place where he had received the sacred Stigmata. And then he said Addio, addio, addio, Brother Masseo, and turning to Brother Angelo he said Addio, addio, and likewise to Brother Silvestro and Brother Illuminato. 'Peace be with you my much dear sons. Addio! I go far away from you in the flesh, but my heart I leave with you. I go away with Brother Pecorello

di Dio [Brother Leo] to S. Mary's of the Angels and I come not again. I go away. Addio, addio, addio to you all! Addio holy mountain! Addio Monte La Verna! Addio Mount of the Angels! Addio dearest Brother Falcon! I thank thee for thy love towards me. Addio, addio, Sasso Spico! I shall not see thee again. Addio, addio, addio, thou rock where I lay when the demon mocked at me. We shall not see one another again. Addio S. Mary of the Angels! To thee, O Mother of the Eternal Word, I commend my sons.'

"Now while he spake thus our eyes were pouring out floods of tears for him, our dear Father, who was going away from us. And he too weeping bore our hearts with him. Orphans indeed were we when such a father left us.

"I, Brother Masseo, have written this with tears.

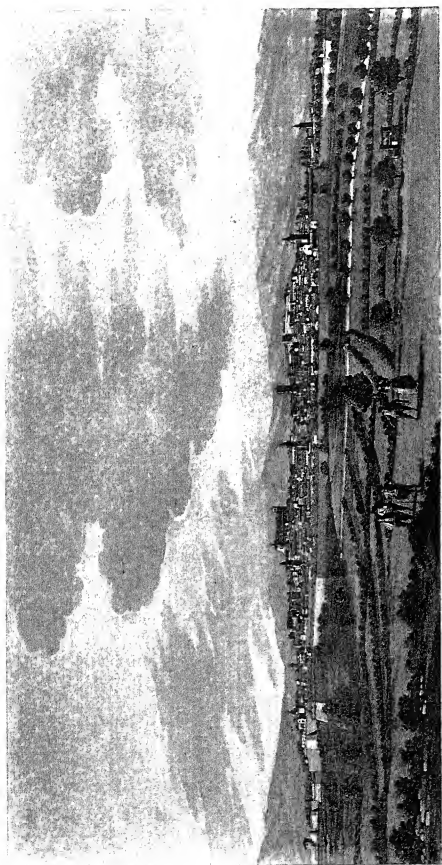
"The blessing of God be with us."

## V

## AREZZO

BIBBIENA, RIGHTLY UNDERSTOOD, IS THE GATE of the Casentino; there the Valley Enclosed begins and ends as Dante suggests when he speaks of the mouth of the Archiano, the scene of Buonconte's death, as at "the foot of Casentino." The valley below between Bibbiena and Arezzo has quite a different character, and is, as it happens, the dullest stretch of the whole river. Not that it lacks beauty, but that it is empty of historic interest in comparison with the other reaches. As for beauty, indeed, the country below Bibbiena is, if anything, fairer and certainly softer and lovelier than that of the higher valley; and Arno still sings there.

Something more than a mile below Bibbiena the Corsalone, a considerable stream, comes into Arno from the east just opposite Terrossola, a beautiful village, and about two miles farther, below Casalvecchio, the greater stream is again reinforced upon the same bank by the Rassina. These two tributaries are the greatest that the Arno receives in this part of its course, and the road crosses the latter by a fine narrow old bridge of the fifteenth or sixteenth century, upon the



*Arezzo*





middle bastion of which there is still a shrine and an image of the Blessed Virgin and Child.

Rassina itself, the little castello on the left bank of Arno below the old bridge, is a picturesque place of considerable antiquity. Certainly a castle existed here in the year 1000, and it belonged first to the Ubertini and then to the Tarlati of Arezzo, and this confirms us in our assertion that at Bibbiena we enter the Val d'Arno Aretino rather than at the natural gateway of the Stretto di S. Mamante.

Rassina played a small part in the Florentine occupation of the Casentino in 1440, and has the honour of being mentioned by Machiavelli. In the fifth book of his Histories he tells us that in her attack upon Poppi Florence sent Neri Capponi with the Florentine forces to Rassina, which he took with Bibbiena, Pratovecchio, and Romena. Thus Rassina came into Florentine hands. The place to-day has little interest for us. The same must be said of the Pieve a Socana on the opposite bank of Arno, its curious round tower like that of the old Pieve of Pienza being its one curiosity.

Less than a mile below the Pieve a Socana the Salutio joins the Arno from the west. Its picturesque and ancient bridge is its only treasure.

Below the confluence of the Salutio with the Arno the river makes a sudden bend eastward, and upon the loop is set the village of S. Mamante at the head of the gorge, a strait which physically closes the upper valley of the Arno. The road lies

right through it till at last at a turn of the way the Casentino is lost and the gradually opening beauty of the Val d'Arno Aretino lies in the new vista before us.

Many a picturesque village and towered castello greets you as you come out of the pass of S. Mamante into the widening valley beyond which Arezzo lies. There is Subbiano beside the river, a little towered place, delightful, beyond the woods of the gorge; there is Ponte a Caliano there with the great four-square Torre del Palagio, which has played its part in the history of Arezzo and the Tarlati; there is Castelnovo, lovelier by far, aloft on its hill-side; and there is towered Giovi just before the old and picturesque Ponte alla Chiassa, where Arno "turns away its snout" from Arezzo and we leave the river for the great city which knows it not.

To come into Arezzo on a summer evening from the glowing heat and dust of the highway is to understand at once the peculiar blessedness and delight of Tuscany, that beauty and joy summed up in her cities in which all that is essential in our civilization seems to be expressed and glorified so that we may actually see it with our eyes.

The little walled town of rosy brick, really a hill town half spilled upon the plain, set so exquisitely and precisely in the country, amid the olive gardens and vineyards all golden with corn, appears first like a low pyramid of brown houses at the foot of the great mountains in the mouth of the

wide valley, crowned with its towers, the campanili of S. Maria della Pieve, of the Palazzo del Comune, and the long roof of the Duomo.

It is, as you soon find, but a little place, wholly confined within its ancient walls, like a city in a missal, save where, beyond the Santo Spirito gate upon the road to Rome, a great borgo has grown up, needlessly one thinks for the walls are too big for the town which has shrunk away from them so that more than one quarter has been turned into a garden all planted with trees. Divided into two parts by the Corso, which runs from the Santo Spirito gate up to S. Maria della Pieve and the cathedral, Arezzo is to-day still a city of the Middle Age, with all the charm of just that, a place of wide and empty piazzas in which more than one fine old church stands silent and half forgotten, and of narrow, stony, and often precipitous ways over which the roofs of the great neglected palaces nearly meet, where there is always coolness.

But Arezzo is older far than anything left to her would suggest. You wander up and down her old ways in the deep shadow of her narrow streets from S. Francesco, with its marvellous frescoes of Piero della Francesca, to the Pieve, with its noble altar-piece of Pietro Lorenzetti, to the Duomo and its great shrine of S. Donato, to the Annunziata which Sangallo built, to the Badia and the church of S. Bernardino. You remind yourself that this was the city of Maecenas, you pass the house in which Petrarch was born, you see the works of

Arezzo's sons, Margaritone, Spinello, Vasari, but it is only in the Museo that you begin to realize how ancient Arezzo really is. There indeed you find the works of her true founders, the Etruscans, fragments of vases and cinerary urns, figures and coins and weapons, the loot of the tombs of that ancient people of whom we know little more than this, that they were her founders.

Arezzo owes all her fame to the fact that she stands there where three valleys meet, the Casentino, the middle valley of the Arno, and the wide Val di Chiana, and that thus she commands the way to the Romagna and the Adriatic, the road to Florence, Pisa, and the sea out of Umbria, and the oldest highway from Tuscany to Rome. This fact alone would account for the fact that she was one of the greatest cities of the Etruscan confederation and that it was she, holding as she did the oldest path here over the Apennines, who founded Felsina (Bologna), the first of the twelve Etruscan cities founded to the north of those mountains. It is as still in command of that path, and therefore an important military post, that she appears to us in the first years of the Roman conquest of Italy, and there in the Second Punic War Flaminius was posted to oppose and to break Hannibal as he came down Val d'Arno from Fiesole into Italy. He failed as we know. Hannibal passed the city and his camp without opposition, and when at last Flaminius pursued him it was but to be broken in the marshes of Lake Trasimene.

That failure of Flaminius to stop Hannibal at Arezzo might seem to foreshadow the future of the city. Arezzo was never equal to her geographical position. In the great days of Rome, indeed, she was seldom or never called upon to play a great part, but in the Middle Age her curious weakness is manifest. Instead of dominating the road through Val d'Arno, she was always at the mercy of Florence; instead of holding the road to Rome through Val di Chiana, she was continually overwhelmed by Perugia, Chiusi, and Orvieto; even the pass into the Marches was seldom within her command. The explanation of this would seem to be that economically she was at the mercy of her rivals, and could easily be isolated, so that though three great highways met in her Piazza, and, therefore, she should have held them all, actually each of them was easily controlled by one of her rivals, the most formidable of which was, of course, Florence which, after temporary successes in 1289 and 1336, finally brought Arezzo into her dominion in 1384.

Her career in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries is what we might expect. She was then ruled first by the Conti Guidi, and later by the great Bishops of the Ubertini and Tarlati families. Under them all she was fiercely and eagerly Ghibelline, and thus, though for no other cause, an enemy of Florence. But there was this also: Florence in regard to Rome and the sea was at the mercy of those Ghibelline powers, Arezzo, Siena,

Pisa. If her caravans would reach Rome they must pass either by Arezzo or by Siena, if they would come to the sea they must get leave of Pisa. But Florence was a growing commercial community, the absolute freedom of the roads, of the exits from Tuscany, was necessary to her and therefore we see her attempt, and successfully, to break these three cities at whose mercy her commerce lay, first Arezzo and that gave her the road to Rome, then Pisa, and that gave her the way to the sea, last of all Siena, and that gave her all Tuscany.

It was perhaps necessary, certainly it was the easiest part of her task, to break Arezzo first and thus secure a road to Rome, at any rate, this is what was done. In the month of June 1289 was fought the battle of Campaldino at which Dante was present in the Florentine ranks, and which was won by the impetuous disobedience of Messer Corso Donati when he charged at the head of the men of Lucca and Pistoja, crying, "If we lose I will die in battle with my fellow citizens, and if we conquer let him that will come to us at Pistoja to exact the penalty." The Aretines were utterly broken, 1,700 were slain and 2,000 taken prisoners, of which more than 740 were brought bound to Florence, according to Villani. But Florence had not clearly understood the object of her attack. Instead of taking Arezzo, she marched up into the Casentino and seized Bibbiena, and though at last her troops turned back and laid siege to the city,

they failed to take it. However, in the year of Corso Donati's death, 1307, Bishop Guido Tarlati of Arezzo was sent into exile, the Guelfs called back, and there was peace between Arezzo and Florence. Then the Emperor Henry VII came into Italy and the Ghibelline cause revived. The Tarlati broke into the city, and even when the Emperor died so miserably at Buonconvento in 1313, after failing to take Florence, they were not to be denied. Guido Tarlati was once more lord of Arezzo. Presently he made friends with Castruccio Castracane of Lucca, and while this great captain kept Florence busy, he regained all that had been lost at Campaldino, and later took such far places as Lucignano from the Sienese and Chiusi. Città di Castello he took on his own confines and Laterina, which the Florentines had wrested away in 1289, with many other places. So formidable did he seem that every city state in Central Italy became his enemy, and the Pope excommunicated him, for he had crowned the Emperor with his own hands against the Pope's orders, but he was not to be conquered save by death, which found him at Montenero, where he died of fever in 1327. But after the disappearance of Bishop Guido, Arezzo was easily broken. In 1335 the Perugians took the city and sacked it, in the following year the Florentines entered in, and though they were at last beaten off, Arezzo was helpless, so that in 1384 the *condottiere*, Enguerrard de Courcy, having taken her and sacked her, sold



her to the Florentines, in whose power thenceforward she remained.

The fate of Arezzo does not move us as that of Pisa certainly does, nor can we weep over her destiny as we shall always do over that of Siena. For it is not as a commune, a political entity, that Arezzo shines, if at all, in history, but rather as the birthplace of many famous men, famous not in politics, but in art. It is not really as statesmen that these great warrior bishops of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, Guglielmo degli Ubertyni and Guido Tarlati, win our admiration, but as artists in life and in war, in the picturesque and violent manœuvres of that time when fighting was still rather an art than a science. But long before then even, in the first years of the Empire, we find Arezzo famous, not as playing any great part in the administration of Augustus but as the birthplace of the greatest of patrons, that Maecenas whom Horace has immortalized as his friend and whom our own Spenser reports so sweetly:

But ah! Maecenas is yclad in claye  
And great Augustus long agoe is dead  
And all the worthies ligger wrapt in lead  
That matter made for poets on to playe. . . .

To her also is given Guido Monaco, the Benedictine monk born about 990 who invented the modern system of musical notation. Certainly, though by chance, Francesco Petrarca was born here in 1304, his parents having been exiled from Florence but a few months before, while in 1472

that great screw of princes, the princely blackmailer who aspired to the cardinalate, Pietro Aretino, here first saw the light and began his amazing career. In painting, too, Arezzo can claim at least one famous master, for in 1236 (?) she gave birth to the great Margaritone, and if Spinello Aretino, born here in 1333 (?), is merely charming, a charming follower of Giotto, in Giorgio Vasari, who was born in Arezzo in 1512, she produced, if but a mediocre painter, a great architect and the greatest of all historians of art. And here, too, we may see both her strength and her weakness; fruitful in personalities she is incapable of any persistent or long-continued effort. As she failed to produce a commune that could endure, so she failed to produce a school of painting, and as she was governed from outside, so works of art were provided for her, for the most part by foreigners, by Pietro Lorenzetti, Piero della Francesca, the great masters of the Florentine, Sienese, and Umbrian schools.

I suppose the church that every visitor to Arezzo enters first to-day is that of S. Francesco, founded by the Friars Minor in 1322—a charming and spacious Gothic building of rosy brick, which was entirely covered with frescoes by Spinello Aretino and his school. On the right wall of the church is a great dugento crucifix by some unknown Tuscan contemporary of Cimabue (*c.* 1260). Here on the entrance wall is a fine fresco of the school of Spinello, of Christ in the house of

Simon, with S. Mary Magdalen at His feet, and close to the right chapel of the choir an extremely charming Annunciation by Spinello himself who, about 1385, worked extensively in this church painting, with his son Parri di Spinello, in fresco the room under the tower entered from the choir with scenes from the legend of S. Michael Archangel, parts of which remain while certain fragments are now in the National Gallery. In the chapel to the right of the choir Spinello himself has painted in fresco scenes from the legends of S. Nicholas, S. Michael, S. Laurence, and S. Francis. Here, too, is an altar-piece of the Assumption by Lorenzo di Nicolò Gerini. But it is not this work we come to S. Francesco to see, but the work rather of the foreigner, Piero della Francesca, who has covered the choir with his incomparable frescoes of the Legend of the Holy Cross. Nothing left to us in Arezzo is more beautiful or more important than this series of paintings which, indeed, is one of the most momentous and fruitful achievements of the art of Italy.

It seems that about 1446 Luigi Bacci, one of the richest men in Arezzo, commissioned Bicci di Lorenzo to paint this chapel in S. Francesco with a series of frescoes to cover the walls and the roof. The father of Bicci di Lorenzo had perhaps been a pupil of Spinello's, but the son had assisted Domenico Veneziano when he was at work in S. Maria Novella in Florence, and with him as his fellow assistant at that time was Piero della

Francesca. In 1452, as it happened, Bicci di Lorenzo died, and as soon as might be his commission was given to his friend the man who had worked with him under Domenico Veneziano.

We do not know in what year Piero della Francesca began or ended his work, we only know that the great frescoes we have in the choir of S. Francesco to-day were painted between the death of Bicci in 1452, and 1466 when Piero is spoken of in a new contract as "*il maestro di dipingere il quale a dipinto la cappella maggiore di S. Francesco d'Arezzo.*" When Piero began his work he found certainly the roof finished. There Bicci had painted the Four Evangelists, figures not without grace. But on the walls Piero della Francesca has achieved one of the greatest masterpieces in fresco of the latter part of the fifteenth century, paintings which in their masculine vitality, their spacious composition and feeling for atmosphere, their beauty and strength, cannot be matched anywhere in the world.

It is most probable, indeed almost certain, that when Piero began to paint the Legend of the Holy Cross here in Arezzo he was well acquainted with the frescoes of the same subject painted by Agnolo Gaddi in the Baroncelli chapel of S. Croce in Florence. He seems, indeed, to have followed more or less closely Agnolo's scheme, but with a new intention and certainly with another and astonishingly new success. That wonderful legend, which forms one of the most exquisite chapters

of the *Legenda Aurea* of Voragine, has been told with complete good faith by Piero, literally as it was written, even as Agnolo had done, but in Piero's work we seem to come upon it for the first time, his figures are no longer the exquisite puppets of the older masters, making with ineffable grace, though dead, the gestures of life, they live and move and have their being in all the beauty of the light, the air seems to caress their faces, they stand upon a solid earth and move with so noble and quiet a dignity, often extraordinarily dramatic, that the Legend itself takes on something of their reality, life itself, as we understand it, enters into Italian art for the first time. How monumental are those women who stand about the Queen of Sheba when she recognizes the Holy Tree! How tumultuous and violent is that scene of the defeat and death of Chosroes, how noble that kneeling group in the Invention of the Holy Cross! In these works we have the consummate expression of a moment in the art of Italy which in them alone finds expression, and with them before our eyes, if all else that Italy has achieved in painting were to perish, we might reconstruct it at least in our hearts.

The Legend of the Holy Cross, so wonderfully painted by Piero della Francesca in the choir of S. Francesco in Arezzo, is a true dream of the Middle Age, one of the most subtle and delightful of those stories built up out of much contemplation which are too good to be true—a lovely might-have-been that never happened. It seems that

when Adam fell sick at last and was come to die he sent his son Seth to Eden Gate to ask of S. Michael a branch of the Tree of Life which grew therein that he might not die but live, and S. Michael gave him it indeed, but when he returned he found our father dead. Therefore he planted the branch he had of S. Michael, which was a branch of the Tree of Life, upon Adam's grave, and there it grew and waxed great and endured until the days of Solomon who, because it was fair, hewed it down to be used in the building of the Temple, but it was always too long or too short, so it was cast aside into a pool and there it formed a bridge, and when the Queen of Sheba came to cross it she worshipped it because, as she foretold, the Saviour of the World should hang thereon, and by Him the Law should be consummated. Therefore Solomon took it down and buried it, and after, the Jews made a pit in that place and filled it with water and there they washed their beasts for sacrifice, and this was that pool which an angel troubled wherein the sick were healed because the Tree of Life lay therein. And when the time of Our Lord's Passion drew nigh this tree rose and floated upon the water, and the Jews, seeing it, took it, and of it fashioned the Cross of our Saviour. Then, after many years, came the mother of the Emperor Constantine to Jerusalem seeking the Cross, for in that sign had the Emperor been victorious. And she called the priests and wise men of the Jews to her and demanded of them

where was Christ crucified, but they could not tell her, and when she would burn them they delivered to her one of them named Judas, and him she cast into a pit and after seven days he spoke the truth and led her down to Calvary, and there dug and laid bare three crosses, and because none knew which was the Cross of our Lord, S. Helena, the Emperor's mother, laid them in the midst of the city, and about the hour of noon there was borne out for burial a young man newly dead, and they laid upon the corpse one cross after another, and as the third was laid upon him he came again to life. Then S. Helena knew that she had indeed the Cross of Christ, and anon also in the same place she found the nails as shining as gold and all these she worshipped with reverence. Then she gave part of the Cross to Constantine her son, and the other part she left in Jerusalem, closing the place with gold and silver and precious stones.

And to her son also she gave the nails and he set them in his bridle and on his helm when he went out to battle.

Now presently came Chosroes, King of Persia, and took Jerusalem, and he bore away with him that part of the Cross which S. Helena had left there, and when he came home to his house he made him a tower of gold and of silver very marvellous and set the Cross of our Lord therein, and there he sat beside it and commanded that he should be called God and worshipped, for he set

the Cross upon his right hand and upon his left he set a golden cock, and this for the Holy Ghost, and called himself the Father, and his kingdom he delivered to his sons. Then came the Emperor Heraclius with a great host into Persia and vanquished the son of Chosroes, and coming to the King found him in his tower of gold and silver and slew him and christened his little son and made him king in the place of his father. And he brake down the tower of gold and silver and the Holy Cross he brought again to Jerusalem.

Such is the legend that Piero della Francesca has painted with so singular a vitality here in the choir of S. Francesco. It is by far the most considerable work of his life, and, as I have said, sums up all that was most vital in Italian painting at that time, and prophesies of the future even of the work that was later to be done.

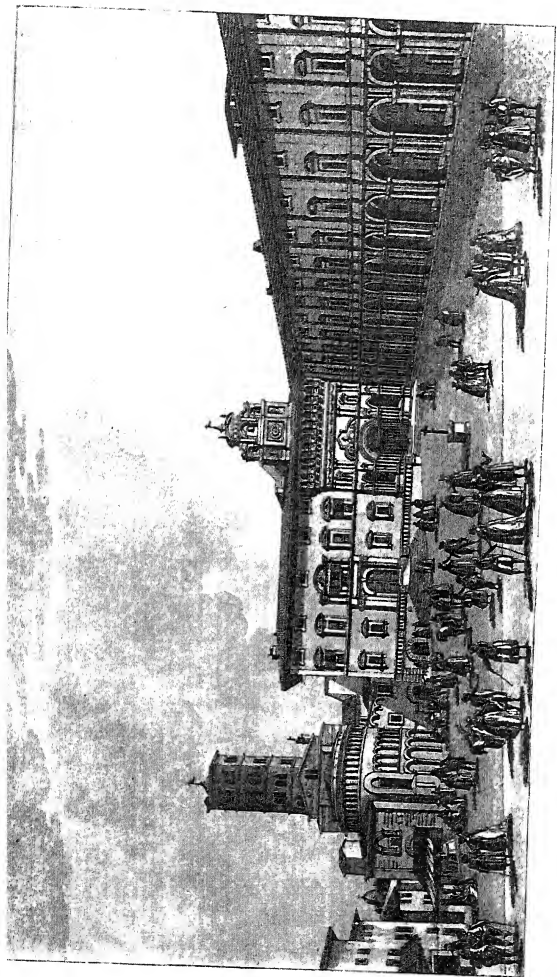
Piero's immediate followers were Luca Signorelli and Bartolommeo della Gatta, but we know of one other pupil and he was an Aretine, Lorentino d'Angelo by name, some of whose spoiled work may be seen here in this very church in the chapel of S. Anthony.

From the church of S. Francesco we climb up, following the Via Cavour, into the Corso to S. Maria della Pieve which stands beyond the Piazza Vasari built in 1573. This basilica is perhaps the most interesting building in Arezzo, a work in its origin and even to-day, in the choir, of the eleventh century, with a tower and façade



of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The remarkable façade of four huge arches supporting three tiers of colonnades with rounded arches and twisted or carved pillars is very striking. The higher the colonnade goes the smaller the arches and the greater the number of columns. This gives a delicate and surprising effect as of a pinnacle upon a romanesque base. Over the architrave is the name of the architect, Marchionne of Arezzo; the date is 1216. Over the main door are some fine thirteenth-century sculptures, the Madonna and Child and figures of the months, and over the door on the epistle side a Baptism of our Lord of the same period. Within, the church is finely spacious but has been very thoroughly restored. Its great treasure, like that of S. Francesco, is the work of a foreigner, a glorious altarpiece by Pietro Lorenzetti of Siena. This is one of the noblest works left to us by this great master. In the midst we see a half-figure of the Madonna with her little Son in her arms, above is the Annunciation, and all about are set saints; beside the central panel of the Madonna and Child, on one side is S. John Baptist and S. Matthew, on the other S. John Evangelist and S. Donato, the patron of Arezzo. The picture is signed and was painted in 1320 to the order of Bishop Guido Tarlati, the great warrior prelate of Arezzo who lies in the Cathedral.

One other thing of interest, at least, remains to be said of S. Maria della Pieve, it was the church of



*The Piazza, Arezzo*



that Canone Caponsacchi who helped Pompilia in her flight, all of which Browning has told us in the *Ring and the Book*.

From S. Maria della Pieve one passes in the shade of Vasari's Logge first into Piazza Vasari to get a glimpse of the characteristic apse of this grand old church; then into the Corso, where stands the fine fourteenth-century Palazzo Pubblico adorned with the *stemme* of the Podestà of Arezzo in mediaeval times. The place is now a prison. Thence one turns up the Corso as far as the Via dell' Orto, down which one goes to reach the Duomo. On the way, in the Via dell' Orto, at No. 22 you have the house in which Petrarch was born in 1304, really by chance, for had his father not been exiled a few months before he would have been a Florentine. As it is, Arezzo claims him as a reward for the hospitality she gave, and though he left the city while he was still a child, and only returned to her once his whole life long, he remains an Aretine.

The Duomo of Arezzo, which is said, without much reason, to have been built by Margaritone is, as we see it, a building for the most part of the very early fourteenth century, but with many later additions, the façade being a work of our own times.

Here, in the left aisle, is a magnificent sculptured tomb, dated 1330, the work of the two Sienese masters, Agnolo and Agostino, in which lies the great warrior bishop, Guido Tarlati. Above,

behind curtains drawn by angels, lies the great prelate, beneath, in sixteen panels, the two Sienese have sculptured the most famous scenes of his life: his election as bishop in 1312; his election as lord of Arezzo in 1321; the submission of the city to his authority; his government in council; and his restoration of the city wall. Nine panels are devoted to his victories and then we see him crown Lewis the Bavarian as Emperor in S. Ambrogio of Milan, and lastly he lies dead in his bed at Montenero. Close by is a wonderful full-length monumental S. Mary Magdalen painted by Piero della Francesca, a curiously proud and noble figure differing in every way from the penitents of the earlier masters. In the sacristy are two works by Piero's pupils, a fresco of S. Jerome by Bartolommeo della Gatta and three panels of a predella, the Birth, Presentation, and Marriage of the Blessed Virgin, by Luca Signorelli. Here, too, is a fine terra-cotta relief of the Annunciation by Bernardo Rossellino, dated 1423.

It is not till we come to the shrine of S. Donato, over the high altar, that we find a work here in the Cathedral of Arezzo from the hands of an Aretine. Nor is this wholly by Giovanni di Francesco of Arezzo, for he had a partner in it and this was Belto di Francesco of Florence. The work, covered with reliefs from the life of S. Donato, is neither in its architecture nor in its sculpture much more than mediocre, the best of the reliefs are, however, of a fine quality, especially those at the back, of the

death of the Saint. It dates from the latter part of the fourteenth century.

In the right aisle lies Gregory X, who died in Arezzo in 1276, in a very simple tomb, close to a fresco of the Crucifixion by Barna of Siena. Other treasures, too, the church holds which must not be forgotten, especially the fine Della Robbias in the eighteenth-century chapel of the Madonna, one of them the SS. Trinità by Andrea della Robbia, two of them the Madonna and Saints and the Assumption by Giovanni. Some of the windows and the ceiling are by a French artist, Guillaume de Marseilles.

But though little remains of the work of the Aretines themselves in their Cathedral, something may be found still in the Palazzo Comunale on the other side of the Piazza. This is a documented fresco of the Virgin and Child with saints and angels painted in 1483 by Lorentino d'Angelo, the pupil of Piero della Francesca. Another of his rather feeble works is preserved over the door of S. Domenico in the northern part of the city.

This old church of San Domenico, almost hidden among the shady trees of its peaceful little piazza, is well worth a visit. Once the entire walls within were covered with frescoes, some of which remain. Spinello Aretino painted there an Annunciation, and his son Parri an arresting Crucifixion. Here, too, is a fine wooden Crucifix of the Tuscan school painted during the thirteenth

century. By Giovanni della Robbia is the figure of S. Peter Martyr: a good and pleasing work.

In the Annunziata, a Renaissance church built by Sangallo, beside the Madonna and S. Francis by Pietro da Cortona, there is, over a side door on the right, a fresco of the Annunciation and saints by Spinello Aretino. But for the better works of these and other Aretine masters we must not look in the churches to-day, but in the Museo.

This stands at the corner of the Via Garibaldi and the Via San Lorentino, which, with the Annunziata, is best reached from S. Domenico by the Via Venti Settembre where, at No. 27, Vasari was born and where there are still certain works of his.

It is in the Museo that we find a work by the greatest, perhaps the only, master that Arezzo ever produced, Margaritone. He seems to have been born about 1232, and once Arezzo must have been full of his works, most of which have, alas, perished. To-day she boasts nothing so curious as the Ancona in the National Gallery, which came from the old church of S. Margaret here, but the wonderful Crucifix with S. Francis kneeling at the foot of the Cross should not be missed by anyone who cares for the work of this primitive master. Here, too, are two pictures of the Madonna and Child by Lorentino. But the obvious treasures of the little gallery are the fine Signorelli, the Madonna and Child with saints and prophets, painted in 1519 for the Compagna di S. Girolamo, two works by

Bartolommeo della Gatta, a S. Roch standing, painted in 1479, and a S. Roch kneeling, votive pictures against the plague, the Tabernacle by "Alunno di Domenico," the Madonna and Child by Guido da Siena, and the works of Vasari in the fourth room. Here, too, are two Madonnas of Mercy by Parri di Spinello and Neri di Bicci, the latter with an interesting predella representing the construction of S. Maria delle Grazie near Arezzo; and other paintings by Spinello and his son Parri.

Vasari cannot hold us even in his native city; it is not as a painter but as a man of letters that he shines, though some youthful frescoes of his in the quadrangle of S. Bernardo, just within the Santo Spirito gate, are not without interest; over the entrance is a fine work, the Madonna appearing to S. Bernardo, by Bartolommeo della Gatta, which makes the church worth a visit. And then it is really on the way to the church of S. Maria delle Grazie, a characteristic Renaissance building which demands of us a little affection, if only for the sake of Benedetto da Majano, who built the porch there, and of Andrea della Robbia, who certainly is partly responsible for the first altar on the left.

But such a hurried glance at the chief treasures of the place does really injustice to Arezzo, because, in the mere cataloguing of these works of art, all the delicate charm of the place is lost. No city in Tuscany has so subtle an allure as Arezzo, in none is one more happy just because one is there. I can



only explain this by the fact that Arezzo is a small and shrunken town, but not too small or too far away. It is, as it were, within reach of all that the modern world has taught us to need, which more and more Florence is learning to offer us to the irreparable damage of her own delight.

## VI

### VAL D'ARNO SUPERIORE

FROM AREZZO THE HIGHWAY THROUGH VAL d'Arno to Florence is the Via Aretina Vecchia, the Via Cassia of the Romans, on the left bank of the Arno. It is this road we shall follow throughout the greater part of its length, but it scarcely finds the river before Montevarchi, or at any rate the crossing of the Ambra. The more direct way to the river and Val d'Arno brings us to the stream at Ponte a Buriano. This bridge, built in 1179, and often repaired since, represents as we may think an ancient Roman ford or even bridge, for, according to Repetti, the old Via Cassia, coming up out of Val di Chiana, made for the stream here and crossed it, and thence followed down Val d'Arno on the right bank. However that may be, at the foot of the bridge there still stands to-day a little church upon the roof of which is an ancient column of granite which still keeps its Corinthian capital of marble. Who knows whether a little temple did not stand here once to the divinity of Arno?

The Chiana now flows into the Arno a little below Buriano, but it has only done this since the middle of the eighteenth century. Before then the whole Val di Chiana, having little fall or outlet,

was still much in the condition that Dante speaks of in the *Divine Comedy* where, in the *Inferno*, the pestilential condition of that valley is alluded to, and in the *Paradiso* its sluggishness is used as a metaphor:

... for things there as much  
Surpass our usage as the swiftest heaven  
Is swifter than the Chiana.

The modern hydraulic works and the great weir which now control the confluence of the two rivers may be seen if we follow the high road for Florence out of Arezzo at Chiusa dei Monaci; but so we shall miss Castel di Rondine in all its beauty over the right bank of Arno above the Stretto dell' Imbuto, which marks the end of the Val d'Arno Aretino, and the beginning of the Val d'Arno Superiore.

The Castello, which still remains though in hopeless ruin indeed, itself marked the confines of the Aretino here. It was built by the Commune in the twelfth century. In 1287 it was taken by the Guelfs expelled from the city of Arezzo, who long held it, but in 1323 Guido Tarlati, the great bishop, went out against it and after a long siege took it, and it figures on his tomb among his victories in one of those reliefs which adorn that famous monument. In 1338 it came into the hands of Florence, with Arezzo, and finally, in 1385, the Rondinesi submitted themselves by a solemn act to the Florence Republic.

If the traveller has been wise enough in leaving

Arezzo to make for Ponte a Buriano, and crossing the river there to find out Rondino, he should continue on the road which presently descends under the Castello of Laterina, upon which the Florentines made their famous and sudden assault in 1288, as described by Villani. Here he should cross the river by the Ponte al Romito, in the midst of the Valle dell' Inferno, so called by reason of its curious mineral springs.

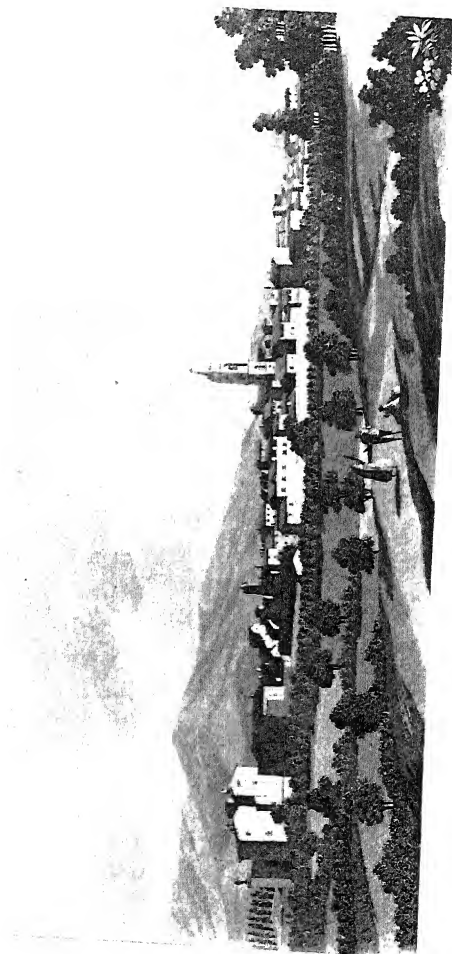
The Ponte al Romito, of two arches, by which we cross the Arno to-day is sufficiently old and beautiful; but it is but of yesterday in comparison with the old bridge above it, the mighty ruins of which remain lovely in their destruction. It was here, as Villani records, that the Marshal of Charles of Anjou was defeated by Corradino in 1268.

Corradino, it seems, came to Siena and was received with enthusiasm, but whilst he sojourned there "the marshal of King Charles, which was called M. William di Belselve, with his people departed from Florence on S. John's day in June to go to Arezzo to hinder the movements of Corradino; and by the Florentines they were escorted and accompanied as far as Montevarchi; and they desired to accompany him till he should be nigh unto Arezzo, hearing that the journey was like to be disputed, and fearing an ambush in the region round about Arezzo. The said marshal being beyond measure confident in his people, would have the Florentines accompany him no further, and in front of the cavalcade he set M.

William the standard-bearer with three hundred horsemen well armed and in readiness and he passed on safe and sound. The marshal, with five hundred of his horsemen, not on their guard nor keeping their ranks and for the most part unarmed, prepared to advance, and when they came to the bridge at Valle which crosses the Arno nigh to Laterina, there sallied forth upon their rear an ambush of the followers of Corradino which, hearing of the march of the said marshal, had departed from Siena under conduct of the Ubertini and other Ghibelline refugees from Florence; and being come to the said bridge, the French not being prepared and without much defence were defeated and slain and the greater part were taken and those which fled towards Val d'Arno to the region about Florence were taken and spoiled as though they had been enemies; and the said M. William the Marshal and M. Amelio di Corbano and many other barons and knights were taken and brought to Siena by Corradino, and this was the day after the feast of S. John the 25th day of the month of June in the year of Christ 1268. . . .”

Ponte al Romito, where all this befell, gets its name from an old Ospedaletto in honour of S. Cataldo, the Irish patron of Taranto. The church and Ospedaletto were built with the bridge in 1109 by the monks of S. Trinità dell' Alpi, high up on the Casentino side of the Pratomagno watershed.

Crossing the Arno at Ponte al Romito, one soon



*Montevarchi*



comes on to the Via Cassia to follow it steeply to Levane, where it crosses the Ambra by a fine bridge which still keeps its shrine, and so on into the town of Montevarchi.

Montevarchi lies in the plain, but of old it would seem to have consisted of a great castello set on the hills where a few ruins still remain guarded by a rude cross. It was to this castello, already ancient, that, as Villani tells us, some of the Guelfs withdrew when they were driven out of Florence in 1248. "When the Guelf party were driven from Florence the nobles of that party withdrew some of them to the fortress of Montevarchi in Val d'Arno . . . and it came to pass that in the same year they which were at Montevarchi were attacked by the German troops which were in garrison in the fortress of Gangareta in the market-place of the said Montevarchi, and there was a fierce battle of but few people as far as the Arno between the Guelf refugees from Florence and the Germans." In the end the Germans were discomfited and a great part thereof slain and taken prisoners. This market-place was certainly on the Via Cassia, and was, perhaps, the Montevarchi which we know. The castello was then in Guidi hands. In 1254, however, Conte Guidi, son of Count Tegrimo of Porciano, sold a fourth part of the castello to the Florentines. In the same year, from others of the Guidi, Florence obtained two other quarters with a fourth part also of "the old market and the new," and of the piazza near



to the Canonica, that is to the church of S. Lorenzo, so that before the middle of the thirteenth century Florence owned three-quarters of the castello and a part of the town below it.

The castello was important as a fortress, holding the road, but more as being situated on the confines both of the diocese of Arezzo and of that of Fiesole. After 1289 it was wholly comprised within the *contado* of Florence.

To-day Montevarchi is a delightful white town by which the river flows softly under the poplars. It contains, however, little to detain us from even more delightful places. Only in the church of S. Lorenzo in the sacristy there is preserved a very beautiful Crucifix of silver exquisitely sculptured, attributed to Benvenuto Cellini, and six reliefs of the Robbia school which once formed part of the altar of the Madonna del Latte. Montevarchi, it seems, boasts a wonderful relic; that of a phial of the milk of the Blessed Virgin. This, as they say, was presented to the church by Guido Guerra de' Guidi. It is he who is represented as presenting the relic in one of these charming reliefs; another shows us the arms of his family upheld by two delightful *putti*; in others we see S. Sebastian, S. John, and Our Lord in the tomb; while in others we have a series of delightful angels' heads, no less than thirty-three of these being preserved to us.

The church of S. Lorenzo contains nearly all that Montevarchi has to give us in the way of

works of art; but other reliefs of the Robbia school may be found in the neighbourhood, notably at Galatrona in the hills south of the town above Bucine. Here, in the parish church, is an hexagonal font with reliefs of the life of the Baptist, and a statue of S. John in a niche, as well as a beautiful ciborio of white and blue terra-cotta with two praying angels.

From Montevarchi we pass on down Val d'Arno beside the river under the poplars till, in something less than a mile, we cross the river by the great bridge there and climb up to Terranuova Bracciolini in the Giuffenna Valley.

This castello, for such it remains, was built in 1337 by the Florentine Republic. It has but one claim upon our notice apart from its picturesqueness, for the fact that it was sacked in 1529 by the rabble of the Constable Bourbon on the way to Rome goes for nothing; it was here Poggio Bracciolini was born in 1380. That great humanist, the son of very poor parents, first gained notice for his skill in copying manuscripts, and in 1403 became secretary to the Curia Romana. His chance came during the Council of Constance, when he employed his time in exploring the convents in the neighbourhood for manuscripts, recovering thus the works of many Roman authors such as Quintilian, Lucretius, Silius Italicus, and Vitruvius. In 1452 he retired to Florence and became secretary to the Republic. His scholarship was inaccurate but fruitful, his temper violent, his

manners bad, even passing the humanists of his time, he was vulgar and lacking in refinement; but he contrived most curiously to serve mankind and for this we forgive him all his faults of ostentation, bad temper, violence, and meanness, even his vulgarity and charlatanism, which were perhaps inevitable in the transition from the mediaeval society to the modern individualism.

One comes to Terranuova, however, let us confess it, not for Poggio's sake, but because it is on the way to three little places in the hills here, the hills of the Pratomagno range which still hold safe inestimable treasures.

The first of these little places and the nearest to Terranuova is Ganghereto on the other side of the Giuffenna. Here in the church of S. Francesco is a fine Margaritone, a portrait panel of S. Francis. But finer things await us in the farther hills. If you push on from Ganghereto to Gropina, you will find there a wonderful church of the eleventh century with a noble and lovely apse, a fine ambone, and many a curious capital. Even that, however, is not the true reward of this tiring but lovely journey. From Gropina push on by Loro-Giuffenna to Montemarciano, and there you will find not only the old thirteenth-century gate of the castello, but a little church or oratorio with a fifteenth-century arcade about it, and having within one of the grandest of Masaccio's works, a glorious if fading fresco of the Madonna and Child enthroned between two saints. That fresco

would be sufficient reward were all the way as dull as it is fair and delightful; it is a master work and worth any trouble to see.

It is easy to descend from Montemarciano into Val d'Arno and to come there to the most interesting and important of all the little towns in this part of the valley, I mean S. Giovanni in Val d'Arno.

The charming little town of S. Giovanni lies in the plain and is traversed by the Via Cassia. It was founded by the Florentines as a *castello* to hold in check the nobles hereabout, especially the Ubertini, in 1296, as Villani records. "In the said year [1296] the Commune and people of Florence being in very good and happy state, in order better to fortify themselves in the *contado* and to hold in check the power of the nobles and especially the Pazzi of Valdarno and the Ubertini who were Ghibellines, 'ordered that in our Val d'Arno di Sopra should be made two great *terre* and *castelle*, one between Fegghina [Figline] and Montevarchi, to which the name of Castello S. Giovanni was given, the other in Casuberti . . . to which was given the name of Castelfranco.' " But in spite of the warlike intention of its foundation S. Giovanni has little history; all its interest lies in itself and its treasures, its charming aspect there beside Arno, and its churches and pictures and works of art, of which it can boast more than all the other places of this part of the valley put together.

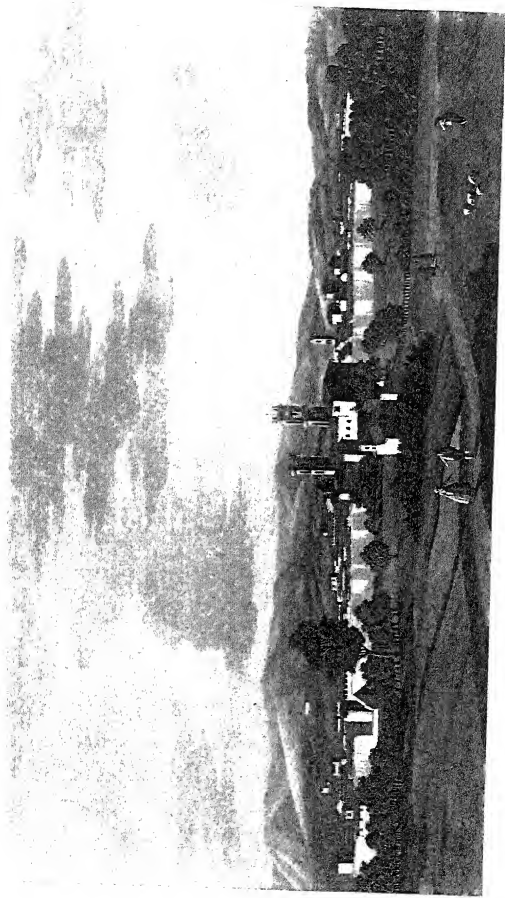
It is best to begin the exploration of any town

with a visit to its principal church, and this in S. Giovanni is, of course, the Pieve of S. Giovanni. As a building it is without interest, for its restorations have been complete; but we may still find there a very remarkable work, a picture attributed to Masaccio of the SS. Trinità, in which we see the crucified Lord supported by the Eternal Father enthroned in Benediction, while the Dove of the Holy Spirit hovers upon the breast of the Father over the aureoled head of the Son. On either side kneel our Lady and S. John.

This remarkable work is in a good state of preservation, a painting in tempera upon a Gothic panel, and is but one of several paintings attributed to Masaccio in this little town which was his birth-place.

Masaccio was born in or about 1401, and, as Vasari tells us, "in Castello S. Giovanni in Val d'Arno, where it is said that some figures are still to be seen which were executed by him in his earliest childhood." What these works were we do not know. One cannot certainly attribute a painting like that of the SS. Trinità even to "the earliest childhood" of so great a master; but there seems to be considerable doubt whether anything in S. Giovanni is from his hand. The fresco at Montemarciano, of which I have spoken, is probably an early work.

Two other panels, perhaps once the wings of this picture of the SS. Trinità, remain in the Pieve of S. Giovanni; in each we see two saints with a



*San Giovanni in Val d' Arno*



half-figure of another in the arch of the panel. An interesting *Pietà* of the seventeenth century in coloured terra-cotta is also to be found in the church.

From the *Pieve* it is well to go to the next important church of the town, the *Chiesa Prioria* of S. Lorenzo, an older church than the *Pieve*. Here there is a beautiful bust in wood of S. Lorenzo, the patron, a work of the sixteenth century. The church also boasts a fine picture of the fifteenth century of the Madonna and Child enthroned with saints, as well as a charming, if ruined, fresco of S. Antonio. At one time the whole church was covered with frescoes by Giovanni di S. Giovanni, a painter of the eclectic school of Matteo Rosselli, born in this place.

That fifteenth-century picture of the Madonna and Child enthroned is worth some trouble to see, and the same may be said of the fine picture of Christ with the Cross and various saints, a fourteenth-century work in S. Lucia; but the real treasure-house of S. Giovanni is the *Oratorio della Madonna*, the most beautiful as well as the richest church in the town. It was built in 1484 in honour of a miracle of the Madonna delle Grazie, and though it has been much tampered with it remains charming and contains some really remarkable paintings which do not by any means all come from this church and have been placed in the sacristy, which thus forms the picture gallery of the town.

There we see, to begin with, a noble Madonna and Child enthroned called the Madonna di S.



Biagio, which tradition assigns to Masaccio, though, as with the SS. Trinità, criticism would seem to refuse to accept any such attribution. Beside this work there hangs a fine Sellajo painted in 1472, an Annunciation, where Mary receives the message of Gabriel in a noble *cortile* as she reads her own Little Hours. Beneath, in the predella, is a small painting of the Nativity, with a little figure of a saint in a tondo on either side. Without these we read the following inscription: QUESTA TAVOLA AFFATTA FARE BERNARDO DI MANFREDI RIGHATIERE ANNO DNI. MCCCC LXXII.

Delightful as this work is it cannot compare for interest or beauty with the noble triptych in the same room, a glorious altar-piece of the fourteenth century. Here we see in the midst the Coronation of our Lady with angels all about her singing, while in the side panels appears a vast company of saints. Above the central panel is a Crucifixion, and above the side panels an Annunciation and two saints. The whole looks as though it might be from the hand of Giovanni del Biondo.

Another, later, but scarcely less charming work, is the fifteenth-century altar-piece of the Madonna and Child enthroned between six saints. But what are we to say of the two noble figures of S. Lorenzo and S. Biagio shining there, or of that wonderful panel where we see angels singing and playing on various instruments? They are charming enough, and come from some contemporary of Neri di Bicci. Nor must we omit to rejoice in that terra-

cotta of the Robbia school in which we see the Madonna in Glory with angels, and the work of Giovanni da S. Giovanni, for he was born here, as I have said.

Such are the chief treasures of S. Giovanni; but before setting out for another and not less wonderful shrine, the Palazzo Pretorio should be visited and the old Casa dei Guidi, as they call it.

The shrine that at last draws one away even from S. Giovanni is the *convento* of Montecarlo, in the hills to the south. There, in that far and lovely place, is an Annunciation with God the Father above in a little tondo and five scenes from the life of the Blessed Virgin in the predella—the Marriage, the Visitation, the Adoration of the Magi, the Presentation of Christ in the Temple, and the Death of the Virgin—by some close follower of Fra Angelico. This delightful work is a free replica of the Frate's lovely altar-piece with predella at Cortona.

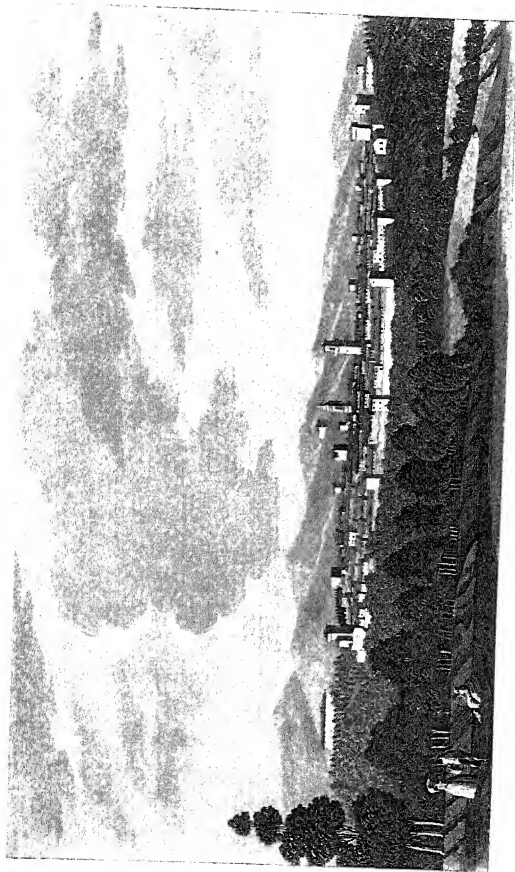
Beyond S. Giovanni the valley grows ever lovelier as it passes on into the Florentine country. There is little to detain us save the beauty of the way, the only spectacle between S. Giovanni and Figline being the curious and ancient Ponte agli Stolli, a narrow bridge of a single arch by which the Via Cassia crosses the Cesto Gorge.

Figline itself, or Figghine, as it was called of old, is but the Florentine successor of a very ancient castello on the hills, now represented by Castelluccio. The town we see, however, was built in

the twelfth century and surrounded by walls very much as was S. Giovanni, and for the same purpose, that of a secure market. It came into the hands of Florence in 1223, as Villani tells us: "In the year of our Lord 1223 this and the Castello di Figghine in Val d'Arno, the which was very strong and possessed both of men and money, rebelled and would not obey the commune of Florence. Wherefore in the said year Messer Gherardo Orlandi being Podestà in Florence, the Florentines sent a host against Figghine and surrounded her round about but could not take her. So they returned and then was built the Castello of Ancisa [Incisa] in order that the Florentines might thence wage war upon the Castello of Figghine."

Thirty years later, in 1252, they took the castello, which thenceforth remained a Florentine stronghold.

There is little to be seen in Figline to-day, though the Piazza Marsilio Ficino is perhaps the finest piazza which any town in this part of the valley can boast. It is named after the humanist, the most illustrious of Figline's sons. Born in 1433 Marsilio was the greatest Platonist of his day, and in 1463 was appointed by Cosmo de' Medici as President of the Accademia. His dream was, and in this he was but followed by the more ingenious Pico, that the doctrines of Plato, being true, could not but confirm the dogmas of the Church and the whole Christian mythos. With him Plato



*Figline*



became a sort of Pagan S. Austin, with at least as much authority as the great Bishop of Hippo. In 1473 Marsilio was made rector of two Florentine churches and a canon of the Cathedral. His services to mankind are certainly not less great than those of Poggio, and he was entirely without the insolence and vulgarity of the later master whom indeed he could not tolerate.

Figline boasts of more than one church of some charm and interest. In the Misericordia there is a small panel of the Madonna and Child enthroned by Giovanni del Biondo. Far more important and lovely is the large altar-piece in the Pieve of the Madonna and Child enthroned with SS. Elizabeth of Hungary and Louis of Toulouse and six angels. This fine work is by an unidentified artist of the middle of the fourteenth century.

Incisa, that Florentine fortress, is now a much lesser place than Figline, as I suppose it always to have been, yet it is picturesque enough, its bridge still dominated by the Torre Bandinella.

The main importance of Incisa was chiefly due to the fact that there the older road from Arezzo to Florence left the valley, refusing the long way round by Pontassieve, for the hills, which it crossed by S. Donato in Colline, and so came again into Val d'Arno by Vicchio di Rimaggio and Bagno a Ripoli, entering Florence by the S. Niccolò gate. Nor did the importance of Incisa much diminish when, with the subjection of the whole valley to Florence, and the imposition of

peace, the way over the hills was abandoned for the new way through the valley—the Via Aretina Nuova; for this new way here crossed the river by the great bridge we see from the left to the right bank, along which it continued all the way to Florence, which it entered by the Porta alla Croce.

To-day we follow that road, coming first by a lonely by-way to Rignano, where there is another great bridge over the Arno, and then upon the left bank of the river, in some two miles, to S. Ellero, passing on the way the curious bridge and mill of Bruscheto.

Rignano has not much to show save its ancient Pieve, set a little above the village, of S. Leolino, but the most ancient bridge of Bruscheto is very interesting and picturesque. It consists, for the most part, of a series of low platforms of stone pierced here and there, especially in the middle where a sort of pent roof spans the main stream, or rather, that part of it which does not serve the mill.

## VII

### VALLOMBROSA

**A**T S. ELLERO, SOME TWO MILES BEYOND Rignano on the right bank of the Arno, a little funicular railway climbs up to Saltino and the woods of Vallombrosa which Milton, who named them almost by chance and chiefly, one may think, for the beauty of the name, Vallombrosa, has made famous through the world.

It was not for Milton's sake, however, that I went up out of the valley to Vallombrosa, but for that of a great Catholic saint, S. Giovanni Gualberto, who there founded a new Order and gave it the Rule of S. Benedict. It is true that the monastery he founded is suppressed and his monks know it no more, but the great act of his life will keep his memory green till the end of time, in spite of the indifference of the many and the usurpation of the modern world. That great act was not the foundation of a new Order of monks, but the forgiveness of an enemy.

In the earlier years of the eleventh century there was born to Gualberto de' Visdomini, Signore of Petroio, in Val di Pesa, two sons, Ugo and Giovanni. They grew up together and loved each other passing well, but the younger, Giovanni, seems ever to have been something of a dreamer,



while the elder, Ugo, followed his father, was a warrior and a great lord.

Now as it happened in those days the *contado* of Florence being full of great nobles who lived by war and robbery, Ugo was one day murdered by an enemy of his, a gentleman of the country, and Giovanni, driven by his love and the custom of those times, was eager to avenge him, and his father also urged him to this duty. It happened that he met his man as he rode into Florence one Good Friday morning, and this in a way so narrow and steep, that having the advantage, for he was descending the hill-side, his enemy could not escape him or fail to pay the penalty. Giovanni, seeing the murderer of his brother thus in his hands, drew his sword and would have dispatched him straight, but hearing the name of Jesus, for Whose sake his enemy begged mercy on his knees, suddenly the remembrance of Christ who, as on that day, prayed for His murderers on the Cross, came upon him, and in a moment his heart was changed, and alighting from his horse meekly he raised his enemy and said: "I can refuse nothing that is asked of me for the sake of Jesus Christ. I give you not only your life but my friendship for ever. Pray for me therefore that God may pardon me my sin." And after embracing, each went on his way; but Giovanni came to the monastery of S. Miniato of the Benedictines, and stealing into the church, knelt before the great crucifix of that place, begging with tears for the

pardon of his sin, half afraid of what he had done. And whilst he continued his prayer the crucifix miraculously bowed its head to him "as it were to give him a token how acceptable was the sacrifice of his resentment." Then rising from his devotions he sought the Abbot and, casting himself at his feet, beseeched of him the Benedictine habit.

Now the Abbot realized at first only the astonishment of what had been done, the strangeness of the act of refusal, and its novelty. Therefore he feared what old Visdomini, a very powerful lord, might do; but at length he received the young Giovanni and allowed him to live in the community in the secular habit. And after a little while Giovanni cut off his hair himself and put on a habit which he borrowed.

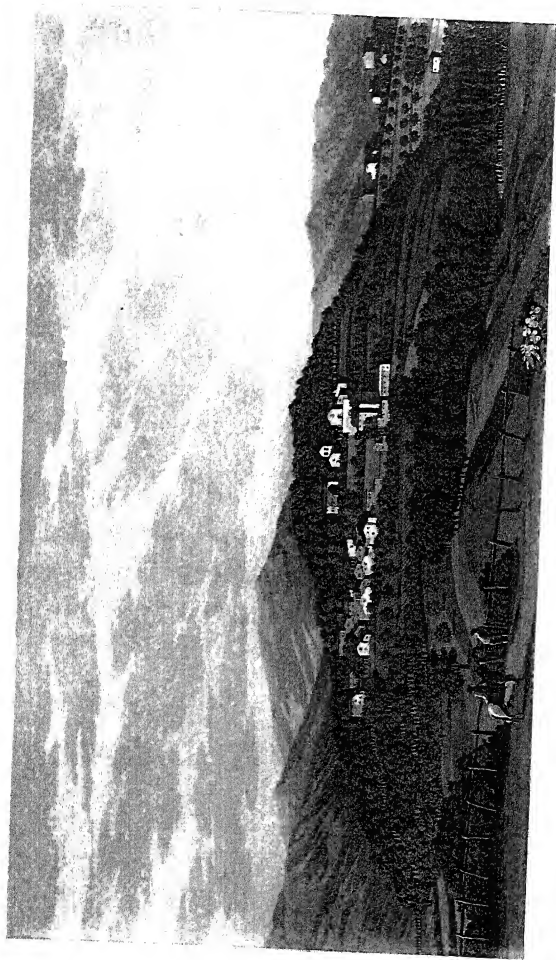
It was perhaps necessary for him to seek the shelter of a religious house. His act was without precedent in the annals of Florence and the Abbot was right to fear the displeasure of Visdomini. Yet after a time even his anger was appeased, so that the father who had come to curse remained to bless and presently exhorted his son to persevere in his good purpose.

And this he did indeed, living for some years as a monk at S. Miniato, and to such good purpose that when the Abbot died he was entreated by the greater number of the monks to rule them, but he would not consent, and not long after left the house with one companion to seek a closer solitude.

In the course of this journey he visited the

hermits of Camaldoli, and liking their solitude, and perhaps directed by them, he came thence over the great hills again into Val d'Arno to Vallombrosa, where he found two hermits with whom he and his companion presently decided to live. So they built a small house of timber and wood and formed together a little community under the primitive Rule of S. Benedict. It was the Abbess of S. Ellero, the Contessa Ilta dei Guidi, to whom all these woods belonged, who gave them the land upon which to build their house and chapel, and it was Pope Alexander II who, in 1070, approved the new Order of Vallombrosa together with the Rule, which was that of S. Benedict with certain additions made by Giovanni, who was the first Abbot, though never a priest. He gave his monks a habit of ash colour, almost black, with a broad scapular and coat and a girdle of stuff. The device of the Order was the arm of the founder in the cowl, grasping a crutch and surmounted by a mitre on a blue field.

Giovanni Gualberto spent his life in fighting simony, then so rife in Tuscany, as we shall see when we come to the Abbey of Settimo. He founded many houses for the monks of his Order, the first and most famous of which, after Vallombrosa itself, was that of S. Salvi, outside the Porta alla Croce of Florence; others, too, were established at Moschetta and Passignano, at Rozzuolo and Monte Salario. There were some twelve houses of his Order at his death, which came to him at



*Vallombrosa*



Passignano where, seeing he was to die, he called to him all the abbots of his Order, to exhort them to maintain the Rule he had given them; and so receiving the last Sacraments he died happily on the 12th July 1073 at Passignano and was there buried and later canonized, according to Villani, by Pope Gregory.

There is, alas, but little to be seen in the secularized buildings at Vallombrosa that reminds us of this great and fearless man. They date from the seventeenth century and are no longer in the hands of religious. Nevertheless, they bear witness to the dream of the founder, and especially to the influence of Camaldoli upon him, if only in this, that they consist of two distinct retreats, the monastery with its church, where there still remains a relic of S. Giovanni enshrined in a casket of the sixteenth century, and the hermitage, three hundred feet above the monastery. The monastery has been turned into a school of forestry, the hermitage into an hotel; there is little in either to call for our affection to-day. But in the woods, not in the great heats of August when the whole place is overrun by the rich Romans and Florentines, but in spring or autumn, we may still, if we will, find the memory and the spirit of S. Giovanni who loved silence and forgave his enemy and communed there with God. In spite of the desecration of the modern world, the invasion of the multitude, these woods are still holy and infinitely still, full of the music of the

wind and scattered with half-ruined shrines and chapels where we may still linger and perhaps pray to that half-forgotten Friend S. Giovanni served and loved so well. Paradisino they call that lofty place where he founded his Hermitage, paradise in little, and so it is. Beneath you, across the forest, lies all the beauty of Val d'Arno, the river, beside which runs the road that Dante and S. Francis have trod and along which all the wonder of the Middle Age has passed in peace and war between Florence, glistening there in the sunlight, and Rome, far and far away. No wonder men have loved this place, and if indeed it was more than a beautiful name to Milton, the memory of it in his bitterness, the vision of it in his blindness, must often have returned to him. Perhaps he was there in the autumn of the year when the winds roar down from the Apennine and Acqua Bella and all its water-brooks are golden with leaves. Perhaps it was then he conceived that mighty image and beheld Lucifer, whose "form had yet not lost All her original brightness," towering there and calling his legions:

... Angel Forms, who lay intrans't  
 Thick as Autumnal Leaves that strow the Brooks  
 In Vallombrosa, where the Etrurian shades  
 High overarch't imbower. . . .

These lines, so wonderful in their imagery and suggestion and music, alone would draw one to the place to-day in the golden autumn of Tuscany, though S. Giovanni had never lived there or the place had no benediction of its own.

## VIII

### VAL D'ARNO FIORENTINO SUPERIORE

#### PONTASSIEVE TO FLORENCE

AFTER DESCENDING ONCE MORE INTO THE valley from Vallombrosa we follow the narrow pass between S. Ellero and Pontassieve, through which the river runs below the road on the right bank. There are some few tiny places which have played their part in history though now they are nothing. The first of these is Altomena in the hills above the road. This was a small castello of the Conti Guidi in which there was and is a little church dedicated in honour of S. Lucia. After the battle of Montaperto (1260) the Ghibellines, who were there victorious, penetrated into Altomena to attack a house of their enemies situated over the gate of the castello.

Upon the opposite side of the river, and also in the hills, stood till it was destroyed by the Florentines the similar castello by Volognano with its little church of S. Michele. This belonged to a branch of the Signori who called themselves da Cuona e Volognano. In or about 1226 there flourished here a certain Ruggero di Alberto da Cuona, or da Quona, who gave his name to one of the gates of the second circle of walls in Florence. He was a Guelf, but his brother



Filippo was a Ghibelline. It was Filippo who, upon the expulsion of the Ghibellines from Florence in 1267, was elected their captain, and it was he who, secure in the Castello of S. Ellero with eight hundred Ghibellines, first made war upon the Florentines and then defended the castello when it was besieged and taken by the Guelfs of Florence in that year, as Villani records. Upon that occasion Geri da Volognano and probably Filippo, the captain, with his followers also were taken prisoners and placed in the Torre del Palagio in Florence, and therefore that prison was afterwards called the Volognano. Only an old and picturesque wall at the mouth of the Vicona del Pelago, once dominated by the Castello di Volognano, remains to remind us of the importance of the place.

The Castello of Volognano and that of Lucente, also in the hands of the *nobili* of Quona, were admirably placed to command the Val d'Arno at a crucial point, that namely where it finally turns westward towards the sea after its long course a little west of north. They both stood to the east of the difficult crossing of the Sieve, whose profound valley debouches into that of the Arno from the north at Pontassieve.

There is little to see at Pontassieve. The little town, scarcely more than a village, stands upon the western bank of the Sieve where it joins the Arno and is reached by two bridges, one built in 1837 swept away by flood and rebuilt in 1888, which

now carries the main road; the other old and noble; both cross the lesser stream. As we see it, the old bridge is, according to Repetti, the work of the famous Bartolommeo Ammannato in 1555, but Vasari attributes it to Tommaso di Stefano di S. Piero a Ponte; it replaced the ancient bridge which had been washed away, as the inscription tells us:

COSM. MED. FLOR. REIP. DUX. II.

HUNC PONTEM AB INGENTI AQUARUM INUNDATIONE  
MAGNA CUM LABE FUNDITUS EVERSUM RIFICIENDUM  
CURAVIT ANNO DOM MDLV.

The floods of the Sieve were notorious. *Arno non cresce se Sieve non mesce* says a Florentine proverb, and when one recalls the long course of this river, more than forty miles, its large and half-stagnant passage through the Mugello, and its steep descent thence into Arno, that proverb explains itself. Of all the tributaries of the Arno it would seem to have been the most dangerous, and this was so well known that Berni, writing in the sixteenth century, makes a poem about it, the particular flood he records being famous in history.

Pontassieve had its name from the bridge over the Sieve, so often destroyed by these disastrous floods. It stands there to-day at the western head of the bridge at the foot of the hill of Quona, upon which stood the famous castello also; of which the little town was the *borgo*. Nothing of this

remains, but some ruins stand near the older bridge at the eastern entrance to the town of the Torre Filicaja, built by the Commune of Florence in 1363; it was a mere fortress, and was certainly not the first of its kind to occupy that site.

Pontassieve, as this fortification at least bears witness, must always have had considerable importance, and this not only because it stood at the head of the long westward reach of the river, but because thence two roads set out, one by the left or eastern branch of the Sieve for Mugello, which joined the Dicomano road over the Apennine for Forlì at Dicomano and the Olmo road at Borgo S. Lorenzo for Faenza; the other, the famous road of the Consuma by which the Florentine army passed into Casentino to fight the battle of Campaldino. This last road left the Aretine way north-eastward about a mile and a half to the east of Pontassieve under Lucente. To all these roads, as to the Via Aretina itself, the bridge over the Sieve at Pontassieve was necessary if the objective were Florence.

It is really at Pontassieve we enter upon the Val d'Arno Fiorentino. That most famous part of the Arno valley is crammed with interest from end to end, and there is indeed scarcely a hundred yards of it that is without its memories and its monument. Nor is one bank of the river superior to the other in this. The enthusiast will traverse both and will not be disappointed. Before setting out, however, let us take a general glance at the

course of the river and the structure of the valley between Pontassieve and Florence, for it is largely in these natural accidents that the secret of the site of Florence is to be found.

Though the Arno runs roughly due west from Pontassieve to the sea, its course, especially above Florence, is extremely irregular, it winds continually. At the same time, though the valley begins to open at Pontassieve, between that town and Candeli it is held by a series of small passes between which the river lies in a series of basins. The first of these passes lies not more than two miles below Pontassieve, the second is at Sieci, the last between Quintole and Candeli, and this is known as the Girone. In all its length between Pontassieve and Florence the opening river was continually interrupted by a series of straits and weirs, and these, as we shall see, when we come to consider Florence, were not without their influence upon the site of that city.

As for the tributaries which Arno receives in this part of its course they all come from the north. The first and the most considerable of them is the Sieve, the last and by far the most important in spite of its smallness is the Affrico; between these, from east to west, we must name the Sieci and the Sambre and the Mensola.

I say that both banks of Arno between Pontassieve and Florence are crammed with interest. Let us then take first of all the northern road, the Via Aretina, which follows the winding river all

the way upon its right bank to the Porta alla Croce.

It is a walk of some miles from Pontassieve to Remole, now a village ennobled by a picturesquely towered villa, but anciently a walled castello, its large church of S. Giovanni Battista, unhappily rebuilt in the eighteenth century, still the pieve of not less than six parishes between the hill of Quona and Terenzano.

There is now little to see at Remole, or indeed at its near neighbour Sieci, but of the two Sieci is not only the better worth a visit, but is by far the prettier place. It stands up out of Arno in a crescent where the river curves about an old weir, where the Sieci torrent comes into the major stream. No doubt the first settlement was not here, but under Torre a Decimo in the Sieci valley about the Pieve of S. Martino, where the Mulino del Pievano now stands. S. Martino is the mother church, and though there is nothing to be seen there save two fifteenth-century frescoes of the martyrdom of S. Sebastian and S. Simone in the oratory of S. Simone, for it has long since suffered a radical restoration, it is worth a visit for the sake of the beauty of the little valley and the ruins of Torre a Decimo, where the Salterelli were lords so long ago. If there be little to see at Remole and Sieci there is nothing at all at Compiobbi save the picturesque weir and the dusty cypresses that line the Via Aretina. But it is at Compiobbi the real interest of the road begins.

To begin with, at Compibbi you have a choice of ways into Florence. You may follow the Via Aretina through Quintole, Loretino, and Rovezzano all the way to the Porta alla Croce, or you may follow a by-way over the lower hills which passes through Terenzano and Settignano to find the Porta alla Croce at last from the heights, and to win by the way the most dramatic of all views of Florence. Whichever way you choose you will not lack treasures, and if for me the latter is the finer way, it is perhaps because it is the way home.

But nothing indeed can exceed the beauty of that by-way through the *poderi*, the olives, the vines and the corn, in the shade of the dark cypresses, which brings you to the village of Terenzano where, in the little church of S. Martino, are such unexpected delights. For there behind the high altar we may find frescoes, the work of a pupil of Agnolo Gaddi, a Madonna and our Lord with S. Lorenzo and S. Jacopo, and again S. Mary Magdalen between S. John Baptist and S. Martin. Over the altar on the epistle side is a triptych where, in the midst, we see the Madonna and Child and about her S. Martino, S. Lorenzo, a work, as the inscription tells you, of Lorenzo di Niccolò, painted in 1402. Nor is this all. About the church are set other panels painted on a gold ground. Here are two panels, pictures of S. Lucy and S. Gregory, once part of a triptych by the same master, and another of three saints, S. Benedict and S. John Baptist and S. Lorenzo,

also by Lorenzo di Niccolò, while yet another altar-piece shows you Madonna and Our Lord between four half-figures of saints; this by some unknown master. Over the high altar of this village sanctuary is a beautiful great Crucifix of wood carved perhaps by Simone Mosca, the very famous pupil of Andrea Sansovino, who was born here in 1492.

The road climbs beyond Terenzano a little steeply, and winding through the olive gardens comes suddenly—so suddenly as to take the breath—upon the great view which gives you Florence at last and all the Val d'Arno to Signa at a glance. The place is known—and beloved by those who know it—as the *Crocefisso in alto*. Here, who knows, Dante may have turned for the last time to gaze in love upon the city he was to revile; such is the natural majesty and sacredness of the place. A neglected but still lovely shrine in which is a fresco of our Lord Crucified by some pupil of Filippino Lippi marks the place in the shadow of a dear group of cypresses. In the early morning there is no lovelier spot than this. The sun is behind you and all Florence at your feet, and about, the fruitful valley and the landscape that first Angelico understood and has painted so often, as seen from here, more especially in a little predella piece in the Louvre. No one who knows it can look on other places with a real content. It breaks down every loyalty; so that in England, though one's glance is over the moors of Somer-

set in which Glaston lies and Wells to the long hills of Quantock, half one's heart is far away under the cypresses here, worshipping a fairer valley in a purer light beside a shrine, that, unlike those of home, has not been overthrown, has not been denied to Him in whose honour it was built.

From this shrine the road passes up hill and down, winding along the hill-side past the great villa of Gamberaja, with its noble cypresses, to Settignano, with its church of S. Maria and its memories of Desiderio, the sculptor, who was born hard by in the village, just a group of houses, of Fossataccio, and a piece of whose work, a relief of the Madonna and Child, remains in the oratory beside the church. The church itself has little to show; only over the second altar in the south aisle one of the pupils of Andrea della Robbia has carved the Madonna and Child with angels, five statues in terra-cotta glazed in white.

Other things as humble but not the less precious may be found in the neighbourhood. In the little Oratorio del Vanella, half-way between Desiderio's birthplace at Fossataccio and Corbignano, where Boccaccio spent his childhood, Botticelli painted his first fresco. You may see the shadow of it still under the repaintings. While at Corbignano is the Casa di Boccaccio, where something is still left, part of the old tower, here a fresco, there a broken and undecipherable inscription from the time when the future author of the *Decameron* played there, a little unhappily, as a child—in that delicious place.



And if such places be so precious what am I to say of the little church of S. Martino a Mensola on the hill-side, where the road from Settignano to Florence crosses the stream under Poggio Gherardo, the famous palace of the first two days of the *Decameron*? Well may such a place claim to have been built by Brunellesco. It is worthy of him being, as we see it, one of the loveliest village churches in Tuscany. But it is in its foundation far older than that master, and indeed owes its being to one of our countrymen, S. Andrea di Scozia, who, coming into Tuscany with S. Donato, saw the place, then a mere ruined oratory, and loved it and established there his retreat. Long and interesting was the connection of S. Andrea with S. Martino a Mensola. I have written of it fully in another place<sup>1</sup> and shall not repeat myself here. Only let no one pass the church by, for beside its own beauty and the sentimental interest it has for us it contains more than one lovely country picture, the Madonna enthroned with our Lord in her arms surrounded by saints and angels, by some trecento master, painted in 1391; the Annunciation, by a contemporary of Benozzo Gozzoli; the Madonna enthroned with her little Son with two saints, by Taddeo Gaddi, and another similar altar-piece, by Neri di Bicci.

Such are the treasures that lie upon this road on the threshold of Florence.

<sup>1</sup> *Country Walks about Florence* (Methuen, 1923, third edition), pp. 4-6.

But after all, splendid though this way be, it is but a by-way, though it bring you to Porta alla Croce at last. The highway lies along the Arno, Via Aretina. Let us follow it.

Leaving Compiobbi you come presently under the hills upon the right bank of Arno through Quintole to a most interesting and very important reach of the river, the reach or pass of the Girone. Here was one of the most ancient crossing-places of the Arno; here, indeed, was the most ancient bridge of all, more ancient than the Ponte Vecchio. Close by in the church of S. Pietro is a picture of the Madonna and Child on gold ground by an anonymous Tuscan painter of the second half of the thirteenth century.

Beyond Quintole, where there is nothing to be seen, the road passing the ancient crossing-place cuts right across the base of the low Girone peninsula, thrust out into Arno southward, about which the river winds south and west and north to Loretino, a famous villa which belonged to old Agnolo Pandolfini in the fifteenth century, and of which he may well have been thinking when he praised country life in his work. Above Loretino on the hill-side stands another famous villa, that of Mont' Albano, which Michelangelo praised for its beauty.

Beyond Loretino, on the Via Aretina, we come immediately into Rovezzano, past a great wayside shrine with a fresco of the Madonna and Child painted in 1408 by Niccolò di Pier Gerini, whose

son, Lorenzo di Niccolò, painted the panels in S. Martino at Terenzano. Not far away in the midst of the little town stands the church of S. Andrea of Rovezzano. There is little to see there, the church having suffered from earthquake, and its one treasure, an early and important dugento picture of the Madonna and Child, is not shown. In the sacristy, however, is a delightful terra-cotta in the style of Luca della Robbia of the Madonna and Child, and in the priest's house is a fine stucco bust of S. John Baptist, which may well be the work of Benedetto da Rovezzano or his brother Antonio, for both were born here.

Farther on along the Via Aretina towards the Porta alla Croce of Florence stands the church of S. Michele Arcangiolo. It boasts a beautiful doorway dating from the sixteenth century and a lovely and very early picture of the Madonna and Child. Over the door of the Canonica is a small statuette of S. Michael by one of the Robbia.

Farther still you pass Varlungo, which figures in the *Decameron*, and whose church of S. Pietro possesses an interesting early picture of the Madonna and Child by some Florentine painter of the thirteenth century; and so you come past S. Salvi—once of the Vallombrosans and now a “national monument” for it unhappily boasts of the Cena of Andrea del Sarto—to the great eastern gate of the city. S. Salvi is the last great landmark before you find the gate. It was founded by the Vallombrosans within sight of Vallombrosa in

1048, and it was here, within its shadow, upon the road we have traversed, that in 1307 Corso Donati was killed as he came into the city. The monks bore his body into the church, and it was not till four years later that his family took his ashes away into the city for burial.

Such are the ways between Pontassieve and Florence, upon the right bank of Arno. Let us now turn to the road upon the left bank, which is by no means less interesting and scarcely less beautiful.

Immediately opposite Pontassieve, upon the southern bank of the river and easily accessible by ferry, lies the village of Rosano, with its beautiful church of the SS. Annunziata, once the sanctuary of a convent of Benedictine nuns, but now a parish church. The monastic church was of very ancient foundation, dating from 780, its chief patrons being the Conti Guidi who, in 1068, renounced their rights in the place in favour of the monastery of Vallombrosa. Though to-day the church has fallen from its high estate a few treasures may be found there. Behind the high altar is a magnificent trecento triptych painted on a gold ground with the Annunciation in the midst by Giovanni dal Ponte, and on either side two saints, while not far away hangs a panel by the same artist in which we also see the Annunciation painted on a gold ground.<sup>1</sup> Here too is an important painted Crucifix by some Tuscan master of the thirteenth century.

<sup>1</sup> These two works have been identified and published by Irene Vavasour Elder.

Beyond Rosano, with its beautiful shady *nave*, the road follows the river round the northern base of Poggio S. Remole, past Remole and Le Sieci on the northern bank of the stream till, just before the town of Compiobbi, it passes under Monte Acuto, Villamagna, and the great convent of the Incontro, more than 1,500 feet above the sea. The way up to these little places from the high road is beautiful and affords marvellous views of Val d'Arno and the hills to the north, the Apennines, upon which the convent of Monte Senario of the Servites broods like a bird.

Monte Acuto, once a *rocca* of the Ghibelline Compiobbesi, from whom the little town of Compiobbi is said to get its name, fell at last into the hands of the Florentines and was dismantled. The place became a famous villa in the possession, in the fifteenth century, of the Salviati, in the sixteenth of the Acciajuoli, and in the seventeenth of the Guadagni, famous Florentine families. It consists to-day of a beautiful great towered villa, its dependencies, and a chapel once the church of the fortress, dedicated in honour of S. Jacopo, where you may still find a pleasing fifteenth-century altar-piece, perhaps by Lorenzo di Credi, of the Madonna adoring our little Lord with S. Joseph beside her.

A far more glorious treasure, however, awaits you in Villamagna, which itself is a beautiful and a holy place. The way lies up past the hamlet of S. Remole where, over an altar on the gospel side,

is a very glorious and lovely picture of the Madonna and Child, a work of the thirteenth (?) century, and one of the loveliest things of its kind in all Val d'Arno.

It is in the village of Villamagna, about a mile above S. Remole, however, that you find the greatest astonishment of all. Here, in the Pieve of S. Donnino, is a magnificent triptych of the Madonna enthroned with her little Son surrounded by a host of saints, all painted on a gold ground, while in the predella is a Pietà between six small figures of saints. This is an interesting work of Mariotto di Nardo, who also painted the two pictures of the Annunciation here. It is not, however, the only treasure in the church. Over the altar at the end of the north aisle is a Virgin enthroned between four saints by a close follower of Ghirlandajo, while over the altar at the end of the south aisle is a picture of the Madonna by Pontormo. Remains of frescoes are to be seen in the south aisle, and a fourteenth-century Florentine picture of SS. Anthony Abbot, John Baptist, and a kneeling nun, the donor; above is S. Francis receiving the Stigmata.

But Villamagna boasts of something besides this delightful church and its treasures; it is famous as the home of S. Gherardo, whose oratory, not far from S. Donnino, still possesses a little picture of the end of the fifteenth century of the Madonna and Child enthroned between S. Donnino and S. Gherardo—an excellent work by Francesco

Granacci which stands over the altar beneath which S. Gherardo himself lies buried. This S. Gherardo was a hermit, a *cavaliere servente* of the Holy and Most Eminent Military Religion of Jerusalem and a Tertiary of the Seraphic Order of S. Francis. He was born in the hamlet of La Casellina, not far away, in 1174, the son of peasants of the Folchi family who, seeing his intelligence, when he lost his parents, adopted him and in the service of their sons he made more than one journey to the Holy Land and won his knighthood in most strange fashion. For it seems that when at sea the ship in which he sailed was attacked by the Turks so that all were in danger of death or slavery. While his companions and lords fought and hardly held their own, S. Gherardo prayed in the stern of the ship and by his intercession saved the whole company. For when the Turks drew off it was seen that as by a miracle but two Christians had fallen while more than fifty of the enemy lay dead and more than seventy were taken. So S. Gherardo won the habit of the Military Religion of Jerusalem, and in the service of that Religion remained more than seven years in Syria visiting the holy places and aiding the pilgrims.

In 1219 he returned home, and on his way through Florence he met S. Francis, who gave him the habit of his Third Order; and he retired to Villamagna and gave himself up to the life of a hermit, served when he was sick by his widowed sister. It is recorded that one January he fell ill and was

near to death by starvation, but God caused a cherry tree close by his hut to bear fruit in that mid-winter and this fruit his sister gathered and brought him for his comfort, but when she would have pulled some for herself also she found the tree as bare as the rest. Therefore it is always with a branch of cherries that S. Gherardo is represented by the painters as here in his oratory.<sup>1</sup>

Above Villamagna stands, on the hill-top, the famous convent of the Incontro. Here, it is commonly reported, that S. Francis and S. Dominic met, and from this meeting the place has its name. I can find nothing recorded concerning this meeting, and am much inclined to think that it was not S. Dominic who there met S. Francis, but S. Gherardo on his way home in 1219. The Franciscan convent which marks the place is modern and has nothing to boast of save the wide and splendid view it affords of the Val d'Arno and the city of Florence in the marvellous cup of its hills.

From Villamagna there is a road running northward and west that finds the Val d'Arno again at Badia a Candelì. This is the best way to follow, for the way of the stream has little but its beauty to recommend it.

Half-way down between Villamagna and Badia a Candelì one comes to the Castello di Rignallo, a stronghold of the Abati, which, in the middle of the fifteenth century, was in the hands of the

<sup>1</sup> For a further account of S. Gherardo see my *Country Walks about Florence*, and the works there cited.



Spinelli. It is the Spinelli arms one finds on the façade of the little church of S. Maria below the castello. Nothing much worth seeing is to be found in the church, but the tabernacle beside it is lovely, with a fifteenth-century fresco of S. Thomas and our Lord with S. Jerome and S. Francis.

There is little to be seen at the suppressed Badia a Candeli save the beauty of the place, for its treasures have all been taken from it, save a panel by Bicci di Lorenzo. But at Vicchio di Rimaggio, just above the Badia, on the hill-side, in the little church of S. Lorenzo, there is to be found one of the most wonderful pictures in all Val d'Arno. The church, though restored, is quiet and well cared for, and boasts not a few antiquities, but nothing else that may compare with the amazing picture of the Madonna and Child over the second altar on the gospel side. This is a work of the earliest trecento, by some contemporary of Giotto who, happily, would have nothing to do with the realism he was making so great an effort to restore according to the rules of his Roman masters. Here is a work pure and virginal and a true religious picture which knows nothing of "tactile values," but is still happily concerned not with nature, but with art. In its exquisite purity of line and design it remains as fresh and exquisite as a new-blown lily that has just towered in the garden for the feast of S. Anthony.

Though S. Lorenzo di Vicchio di Rimaggio can boast of nothing to compare with this marvellous

picture, it has other treasures which are by no means to be despised. In the portico, for instance, which still remains to it from the fifteenth century are two frescoes, a lunette with a half-figure of S. Lorenzo between two angels, and a tondo with a youthful saint in prayer. Remains of frescoes are still to be found also within the church—on the epistle side of the nave we see part of a fresco, Florentine work of the late fourteenth century, representing S. Peter admitting souls to Paradise, an exquisite piece of work and a rare subject; while over the second altar on the same side is a fresco of the same period representing S. Francis receiving the Stigmata. Then over the first altar on the gospel side is a picture on a gold ground of the Marriage of S. Catherine, while about stand S. Anthony Abbot and S. Nicholas of Bari and S. Margaret. This is a work of the school of Bicci di Lorenzo.

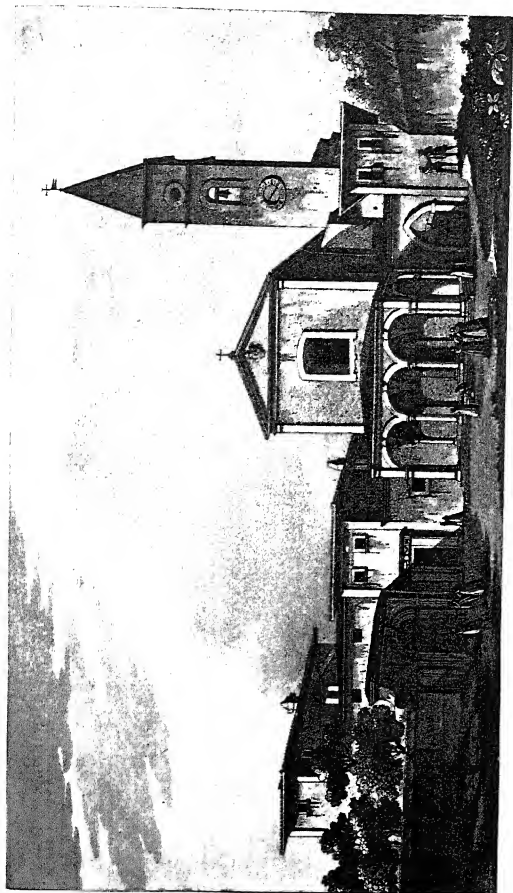
Vicchio di Rimaggio, too, boasts of one of the loveliest views of Florence anywhere to be had of that fair city. The priest, understanding this, has erected upon his house a little loggia or look-out where, over the houses, one may sit and gaze all down the river as it goes under the bridges of the city past the great dome of the Cathedral and Giotto's tower between the hills of Fiesole and S. Giorgio. The view is exquisite and quite unlike any other I know.

Below Vicchio di Romaggio westward towards Bagno a Ripoli lies, among the vineyards, the little

church of S. Maria a Quarto, a Quarto because it stood above the fourth milestone on the old road to Arezzo, the Via Aretina Vecchia, which, as I have said, did not follow Val d'Arno between Incisa and Florence, but climbed the hills westward by S. Donato in Collina. Here, at Quarto, it comes once more into the valley. Originally, doubtless, it did not seek Florence, or rather the site of Florence, for the river crossing, but passed the river here below at the Girone, where there was a bridge before the Ponte Vecchio was built. The road which thus crossed Arno here climbed the hills over the northern bank and passed, by way of Fiesole and the pass of the Futa, into the Emilian Way and the plains of Lombardy. To-day that road and that crossing are lost. Florence has obliterated them, as we shall see.

The little church of S. Maria a Quarto boasts of but one treasure, a picture of the Madonna and Child over the first altar on the north of the nave, a work by Bicci di Lorenzo.

Bagno a Ripoli, which lies just to the west of S. Maria a Quarto, in the plain where it first opens into the upper Florence basin, is a place as old as the Romans certainly, for they built a bath here about a warm spring, and remains of their work were found in 1687. The whole district of Pian di Ripoli is a delightful garden to-day, the richest and, as some think, the most charming, certainly the least spoilt and the least sophisticated in the near neighbourhood of the city. Quite within the



*Badia a Ripoli*



little town at the foot of the hills at a corner where two ways meet stands a tabernacle in which we may still see the fresco Bicci di Lorenzo painted of the Madonna and Child between S. Martino and S. Biagio; while without, the same master has painted the Annunciation, and on the sides of the tabernacle, also without, Christ Crucified and S. Anthony Abbot. This exquisite wayside loveliness encourages one to expect much of the church of Bagno a Ripoli. This, however, which is not without its importance for it was one of the greatest of the Pievi in the neighbourhood of Florence, does not stand within the little town of Bagno a Ripoli, but along the road into Florence, half a mile nearer the city. Unfortunately, this interesting building has been almost wholly spoiled so that the best thing left to it is its portico crowned with noble statues. Within, all is new stucco and whitewash, but there still shines a beautiful marble ciborio of the fifteenth century. But if the church says little to us, we must not pass by unvisited the oratory beside it, which still holds a ruined Giottesque Crucifix and a late Florentine picture of the Crucifixion.

Half a mile beyond the Pieve, before a great piazza beside the road, stands the Badia di S. Bartolommeo a Ripoli which, as long ago as the eighth century, was a nunnery, later a monastery of the Vallombrosa, and is now, since 1808, when it was suppressed by the French, a parish church. Nothing is to be found within worth the trouble

of a visit save a fine tabernacle sculptured in the fifteenth century; but one does well to halt here for other reasons.

A road runs out of the piazza northward towards the river, and half-way there reaches the church of S. Piero in Palco. This church is the successor of a very ancient sanctuary known as S. Piero in Bisarno, because it stood upon an island about which the Arno flowed in two *rami*. In considering, as we shall do, the reason for the site of Florence we shall do well to remember this. The church was nobly frescoed in the fifteenth century, but it still stands in what is little better than a marsh, and the damp has left little of its beauty to it. We may still gather from what is left, however, what it must have been in its full loveliness, and in compensation for all we have lost there still remains in the Antinori chapel a fine bas-relief of the fourteenth century of the Madonna and Child, and in the sacristy a small fourteenth-century panel.

Returning from S. Piero to the Via Aretina one passes on towards Florence, coming first to Bandino and then to Luca Pitti's villa of Rusciano before entering the city by Porta S. Niccolò. At Bandino a road, Via del Paradiso, leaves the highway on the left and in a few minutes brings us to all that remains of the Monastero di S. Salvatore e di S. Brigida. Here, in the end of the fourteenth century, Antonio di Niccolao degli Alberti established in one of his villas, those villas

of the Alberti which were to be so famous, a great religious house of the Order of S. Bridget of Sweden, founded about fifty years before. The church here, now a mere chapel, is hidden among the houses so that you must enter at No. 26 by a little court. There, for all its present obscurity, are some of the most charming frescoes in the countryside of Florence, the work of Mariotto di Nardo, who has painted in this humble place the life of our Lord.

It is with these delightful wayside frescoes in one's heart that one enters Florence at last.

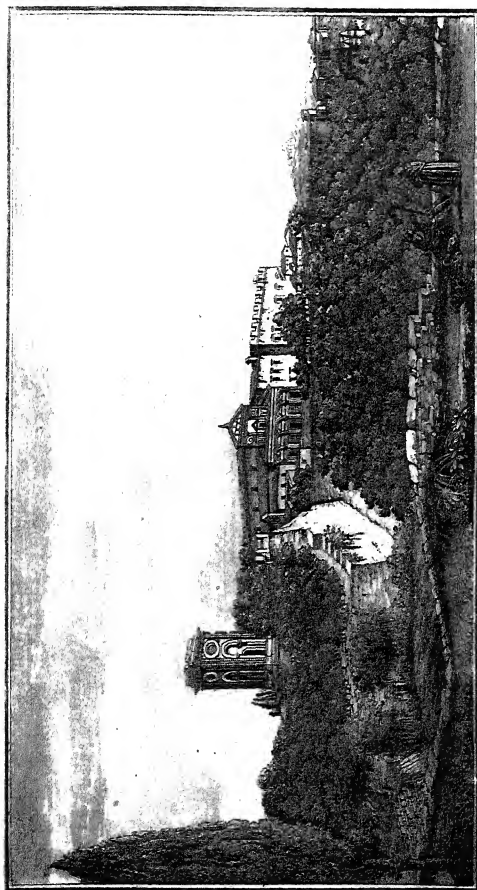


## IX

### FLORENCE

IT IS AS IMPOSSIBLE AS IT IS UNDESIRABLE IN SUCH a work as this to deal with Florence as we have already dealt with Arezzo and shall deal with Pisa. Florence is more than these. Rightly understood Florence is the nodal point, the pre-ordained capital and centre of Central Italy, and however thoroughly one might consider her history and her art, if that fundamental fact escaped us or were considered as of less than paramount importance, all our labour and pleasure would go for nothing; we should have missed the truth, the essential idea, to feed ourselves on facts which, if that idea be not seized, are a mere delusion and a snare. It is after all the idea, which informs the mere facts, giving them life and meaning, that differentiates history from chronicle, and though this brief essay can be but a sketch, it will serve its purpose, and especially in such a book as this, if it turn the reader's mind from the mere data of record to the fundamental things which in some sort made that record inevitable: so that it would be true to say here, too, that all things were ordained from the beginning.

Florence has been considered often enough as a mediaeval commune, and as such her history has



*San Miniato al Monte*



been tirelessly written; her school of art, the best known and beloved in the peninsula, has been analysed and summed up and its achievements recorded again and again; but the fundamental things which made all her great political, economic, and artistic achievements possible have so far as I know never been examined, or only in so superficial and unimaginative a way that their convincing light has failed to illumine both historian and reader. Florence, rightly understood, is the key to the Val d'Arno, and as such the capital point in Central Italy. The river made her and bestowed upon her every great advantage she has, and crowned her queen. Let us examine these things.

The site of Florence is one of the greatest things in Italy. If we consider the geography of that country we find Italy fundamentally divided into two parts, east and west, along a line roughly from Genoa to Rimini, by a range of lofty and barren mountains, the Apennines. To the north of that range lies a vast plain of continental proportions, everywhere watered and nourished by a great continental river, the Po, and its numerous tributaries. There we have a rich and fruitful land of great farms. To the south of the Apennines lies a very different country. Here we have a long and narrow peninsula almost everywhere mountainous, and though boasting many a stream and torrent, without a river and without a true plain of continental proportions. To the immediate south of the Apennines we have, indeed, a country,

Tuscany, which, in any large way, is poor and unproductive, and it is not till we come to the neighbourhood of Rome that we find anything to compare with the natural wealth of the Lombard plain. The shepherds of Latium founded Rome.

This country immediately to the south of the Apennine range which we know as Central Italy boasts of two major rivers, the Tiber and the Arno, neither of which can compare with the Po for size or fruitfulness. The Tiber is the greatest river of Italy proper, but its southern course gives it little fundamental importance in the historical geography of Italy. It is the Arno which has made history.

It is possible and even probable that the Arno once flowed, as the Tiber continues to do, along a course which generally may be said to be south and west. Of old, perhaps, before the beginning of history, the Arno flowed southward past Arezzo into the Val di Chiana and emptied itself at last not into the sea, but into the Tiber, to which it was then a tributary.

This may have been the course of the river in Etruscan times and would, in part, explain the Etruscan geography. But some prehistoric upheaval changed all that and allowed Tuscany, and especially Florence, the great and very different career of which we have record.

By this upheaval the Arno was turned suddenly out of its southern course before it reached Arezzo and was made to flow north-west as far as

Pontassieve, where it turned again due westward and flowed thence to the sea. This tremendous event was not, of course, as simple as that. It was a development that perhaps occupied many centuries. The river, as we have seen, is especially peculiar, not only in its course but in its formation, in the series of natural locks or straits or gorges which characterizes it. It might seem certain that these straits at one time contained, as it were, a series of lakes, and that it was only by the slow erosion of the river that a permanent and always narrow way or gate was forced between them. Such a strait we have found above Florence at Pontassieve, the Girone; such a strait we shall find below Florence at the Gonfolina. When the river forced its way through the Girone, it found, doubtless, a huge lake in the vast plain of Florence. Thus the whole plain between Pontassieve, Pistoja, and Signa must have been a sheet of sluggish water until the Arno forced a way out at Signa by the Gonfolina, and then breaking through the hills by that narrow gorge, slowly drained the lake and went onward to the sea.

If this be so, it can surely be understood that the alluvial deposits of the Arno, and not, as we shall see, of the Arno alone, in the Florentine plain, must have been very great.

Let us then think of the Arno flowing thus westward, entering the plain of Florence at Pontassieve and leaving it by the Gonfolina. What can have been the condition of the river and the

plain? Within the two lofty and steep straits or gorges of the Girone and the Gonfolina the river was deep and at least a unity; but in the plain? In the plain, a mere marsh thick with wood and undergrowth, it must have been almost stagnant and have passed across it in numberless and uncertain *rami* or branches, all of which drained out of the plain and united again in the Gonfolina. Such at the beginning of history, perhaps, was the condition of the river Arno, such is still the condition of many rivers in Italy; but it was, and, though less insistently, is, only the Arno that has a paramount importance. Why? Because the Arno flows from the Apennines on a westward course to the sea. It lies in all its length under the Apennines, returning along their length under the southern foothills, and thus reinforcing them and adding an obstacle to their already formidable passage. Since the Apennines divide Italy into two parts, so does the Arno, and the river is in a very real sense almost as great a barrier as the mountains.

This must have been especially the case in the plain where the river was half stagnant and broken into numberless *rami*. How difficult is the passage of such streams and how uncertain, though they be far smaller than Arno, every traveller who has gone about Italy afoot knows even to-day. But the whole traffic of the peninsula lay north and south and had to pass the Arno either immediately before or immediately after crossing the mountains.

The traffic lay north and south partly because of the shape and formation of Italy and partly because the south needed the farm produce of the Lombard plain, as the north needed the wool of Latium. Those who held Tuscany were perforce middlemen, traders; and those who held the passage of the Arno were the preordained masters of Tuscany, of Central Italy that is. There, at the passage, was the nodal point, and there was bound to grow up the greatest of the central Italian commonwealths and merchant cities.

But where was the passage of the Arno? The site of that passage, as we shall see, was Florence, and in this lay more than half her greatness.

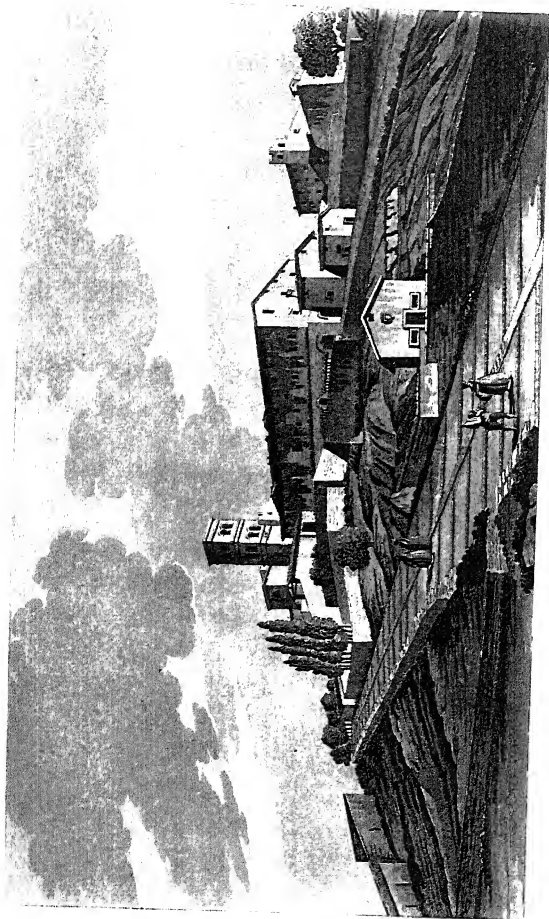
The passage of the Arno was in the earliest times made at two points to serve east and west. If we consider the river again as we have shown it to have been between the passes of Pontassieve, where it first turns due west, and of the Gonfolina, this at least will be at once obvious, that no permanent road could possibly lie across the plain, that no road could attempt the river where it lay in numerous and uncertain *rami*. Had these various branches been deep and permanent it would have needed a series of ferries to pass them; but except after the rains they were shallow and broad and very various, here to-day, gone to-morrow. It is obvious that the natural crossing-places would be at the gorges or straits where the river was both a unity and permanent, where in all seasons a boat could pass and where the stream was single so that



one crossing was enough. As might be expected, the oldest roads of which we have any record crossed the Arno at the Girone and the Gonfolina. How did it come to pass that the passage at Florence superseded and at last suppressed them both?

A study of the map will show us that the vast Florentine plain no sooner begins to open at the Girone than it is interrupted upon the south by the thrust northward of a great headland, the hill of S. Giorgio. Opposite to this steep headland to the east and to the west of it upon the north side of the river two streams of old entered the Arno, the Affrico does so still, the Mugnone has been embanked and canalized, so that to-day it only joins the Arno to the west of the Cascine, but of old it came down by Fiesole under the Badia and passed quite through Florence by S. Marco and along the line of the Via Tornabuoni, entering the river at the Trinità bridge. Now it was these two streams, the Affrico and the Mugnone, which finally made the site of Florence the best crossing-place upon the river. They, and especially the Mugnone, brought down from the mountains a vast alluvium which, little by little, thrust the Arno in one deep stream against the hill of S. Giorgio, and thus formed here, as it were, a new gorge, that is a certain crossing-place, but one which had none of the disadvantages of the Pontassieve-Girone strait or the Gonfolina.

It will be obvious to the most superficial



*S. Margherita, Florence*



observer that though the gorges were the only serviceable crossing-places, of their very nature they had the defects of their qualities; that is to say, though they offered a firm approach to the stream, which they embanked in one bed, they were steep, they had to be crossed, and both their ascent and descent to and from the river were difficult and laborious. The crossing-place at Florence formed by the S. Giorgio hill and the delta of the Affrico and the Mugnone was altogether free from these defects. Upon the north the mount of the Mugnone valley was easy and gradual, upon the south the hill of S. Giorgio could be and was skirted; the hill, isolated by the profound valley of the Ema, was never directly crossed, and moreover the valley of the Greve led directly to it from southern Tuscany.

The crossing of the Arno at Florence was an ideal crossing; it offered so many advantages that it alone would have founded the city of Florence and conferred upon it something like the first place in Central Italy. When we consider the other advantages of the site, its position as regards the navigability of the Arno from the sea, a thing also largely dependent upon the action of the Mugnone, its central situation in the long valley, we shall not be wrong if we go so far as to assert that Florence was ordained from the beginning to be the greatest city in Central Italy; indeed, if we had only Italy to consider one might say that she, and not Rome, was the natural capital of the

country. But the site of Rome as the world's capital was dependent upon other and larger than Italian considerations. Rome presupposes the world of the Mediterranean.

But let us for a moment consider the site and position of Florence in comparison with those of her chief rivals Arezzo, Pisa, Siena, Lucca. As the capital of Tuscany, Arezzo could never have been considered after the occupation by Rome of the Lombard plain. She stood in a cul-de-sac, upon an unnavigable river, and though she may be said to hold more than one pass and more than one valley, it is but in appearance. The passes she held were either minor affairs, as that from Val d'Arno to Val di Tevere, or they were impassable by any great traffic, as the exits from the Casentino over the Apennines. She held, it is true, the junction of the narrow pass between the Val di Chiana and the Val di Tevere, but the riches and the splendour of both valleys were never in her hands. Before the Roman occupation of Lombardy, the Valley of the Po, she had a great and perhaps a paramount importance because she held the narrow way between Val d'Arno and Val di Chiana, and therefore Fabius was stationed there to arrest and to crush Hannibal as he moved out of that passage. He failed, and his failure but expressed the real unimportance of the city in the larger geography of the peninsula, then for the first time made manifest. Hannibal avoided him. It may well be he crossed the Arno at Florence and came into the

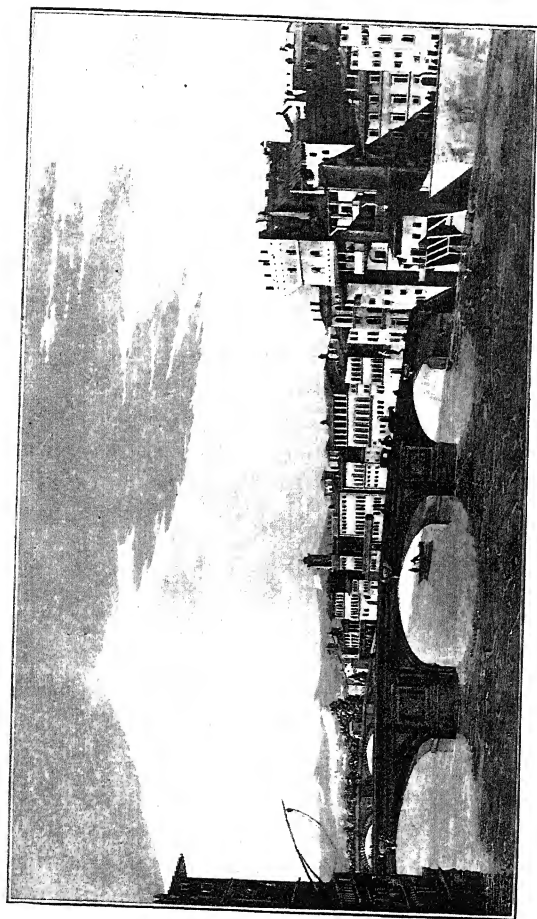
Val di Chiana by the western route; at any rate, he passed the Roman encampment without alarming it and met and defeated Fabius later on the field of Trasimene.

As for Pisa, whose position defined the sea reach of Arno, she too never had the opportunity of the greatness of Florence, but her chance was greater than that offered by nature to Arezzo. Her unfitness was due to two fundamental facts. She did not hold the Arno at a crucial point and she was compelled to face two ways, seaward and landward. As regards the first, it is obvious that to cross the Arno at Pisa was of no advantage, since the object of crossing the river was to be able to cross the mountains on the way north, while on the way south, having crossed the mountains, one wished as soon and as conveniently as possible to cross the river. If a man were going north he would cross by the coast road, and having crossed the Arno at Pisa would find himself with a marsh on both sides, that to the east effectually closing the Serchio valley to him. When he was well and easily over the Arno at Pisa, if indeed that were all, for it must be remembered that Strabo speaks of the threefold mouth of the river, he was nowhere; the marsh prevented him before the mountains and for this cause there was no known and beaten way there across them. In Roman times this doubtless was not so. Then the Serchio valley offered an exit, but the way never seems to have been a highway. It is true that in the Dark Ages those

mountains were forced, though not for Pisa's sake, and a great road, the Via Francigena, the way of the Franks into Italy, though never in Pisa's possession, crossed the vast marshes of Fucecchio to follow Val d'Elsa on the way to Rome. But as from the mountain passes so from that road Pisa was cut off by marsh, and where she could strike and hold it at the mouth of the Elsa she was never strong enough, nor would the political possession of S. Miniato al Tedesco have conferred upon the city of Pisa that pre-eminence which nature had denied her.

The Pisans being what they were, perhaps the most warlike people in Tuscany and the keenest of traders, might perhaps have forced and held the passage of the Serchio valley or have broken Lucca and held the Via Francigena and thus have improved their opportunity, though by no means made it sure, but for the fact that their heart and their treasures were upon the sea and thus their energy was fatally divided. Pisa lost both by sea and land, for no one may hold the sea but with all he has, and on land her position was hopeless between Lucca and Florence from the beginning.

The position of Lucca is unique. It is true that she could never put forward a claim for the hegemony of Tuscany, but when all was over and the Grand Duchy formed with Florence at the head of it, it was found that Lucca alone maintained her independence. Her natural position was impregnable, but at the same time so inacces-



*Ponte a S. Trinità, Florence*





sible and useless that while it conserved her liberty it prohibited any serious claim to pre-eminence.

Much the same may be said of Siena, whose valour and genius and good luck kept her afloat throughout the Middle Age and allowed her to play the part of a serious, and at times successful, rival of Florence. Siena is nothing but a bead on the string of the Via Francigena; she is a town on the Roman road. It is her one and only advantage, and her genius made so much of it that there have been found even in our day historians bold enough to consider her fall as something a great deal less than inevitable and long overdue. Her site, so noble to the eye, is her only tragedy. She is set upon a triune hill on the verge of a desert, she is waterless and cut off upon every side from life, riches, and civilization. Indeed, but for the Via Francigena she would have rotted on high, inaccessible and old as Volterra, and as hopelessly debarred from the full life of the Middle Age. It was impossible that such a place could claim pre-eminence. Had she destroyed Florence, as she wished, after Montaperto, she would not thereby have crowned herself. Florence would have risen again by means of the abundant life of her site, and Siena, however victorious, would have withered, the fairest rose of the Middle Age, upon her mystic hill.

No city in Central Italy could vie with Florence; nature had ordained her pre-eminence from the beginning. Not only did her site offer the ideal

crossing of the greatest river of this region in its middle reaches at the very gate of the two oldest passes over the east and west Apennine, but from the south every valley and mountain ridge pointed at her, led to her, and announced her queen. She is the nodal point of Central Italy, in her all things meet and are resolved and distributed. In the new Italy which we have seen born, and that is already emerging into manhood, she will also play a great part, and perhaps that will mean that her beautiful valley will be filled with smoke, her sun obscured, her sky covered, her vines and olives and cypresses destroyed, her ancientness and her beauty may be wrested from her, and all her long nobility lost in the energy of to-morrow, whose hope is set upon the machine before which all men are equal, for all men are slaves.

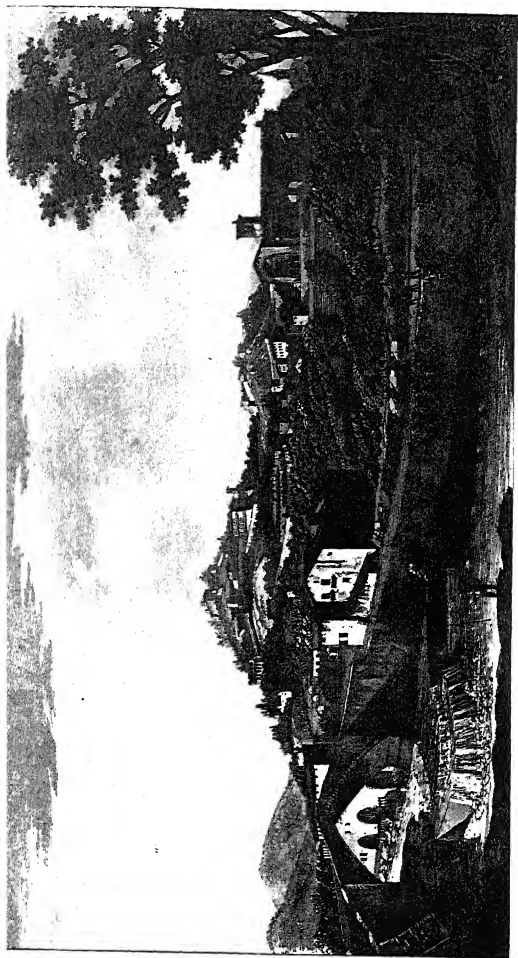
## X

### TO SIGNA

FROM THE GREAT EMBANKMENT OF STONE AND the precipitous walls of the old houses of Oltr'arno which confine Arno so straitly on its way through the City of the Flower, the river comes forth joyfully into the great plain which lies north-west from Florence as far as Piſtoja and is held and contained by those two cities. Everywhere surrounded by lofty and beautiful hills, and especially upon the north and east, this great plain, now a smiling and fruitful garden, was once perhaps the crater of some mighty volcano, the most majestic remains of which are the summits of Monte Morello to the north. Later it was certainly a huge lake which, until it was drained by Arno and its tributaries, completely barred in upon the north-west the city of Fiesole, so that the natural and older approach to the Val d'Arno over the Apennines was not that we chiefly use to-day between Bologna and Piſtoja, but that under Monte Senario, from Faenza. The Arno crosses the southern corner of this plain between Florence and Signa where it enters the hills through which it makes its way by the narrow and precipitous Passo di Gonfolina into the great plain of Empoli, on its way to Pisa and the sea.

Two roads issue out of Florence westward and more or less closely follow the river across the plain to the mouth of this narrow pass. The older and more direct of these is the Strada Pisana, which leaves Florence by the Porta S. Frediano in Oltr'arno upon the southern bank of the stream, and passing through Legnaja, always at a considerable distance from the river, crosses the Greve at Ponte a Greve and enters the Gonfolina at last hand in hand with the river beyond Lastra a Signa, and so keeping ever to the north of the stream goes on through Empoli direct to Pisa. This is the older road and historically the nobler. It was the Pisan highway, the way to the sea, the way of armies too, for by it Charles VIII of France marched into Florence, entering by the S. Frediano gate. But between Florence and Signa, all across the Florentine plain that is, this noble and often beautiful road is, I think, less interesting than the road to the north of the river through Peretola and Brozzi which begins as the great highway to Pistoja, but beyond Brozzi is only a by-way into Signa.

So I set out one fair morning from Ponte alla Carraia for the Porta al Prato along Borgo Ognisanti, staying to visit but one thing on my way before I reached the gate, the little church of S. Lucia sul Prato in the Via degli Oricellari. Here, in the twelfth century, there was just an oratory; but in 1251 the Frati Umiliati, those White Benedictines who introduced into Italy the art of



*Ponte alla Badia, Fiesole*



dressing wool and cloth-weaving, were called into the city from S. Donato a Torri, where they had been established upon the Pistoian way for the greater convenience of the Guild, which had grumbled at the distance of the Frati from the city. Here, at S. Lucia, they built a church and convent which they held till 1547, when Cosimo I obliged them to sell their house so that he might present the church to the nuns of S. Salvatore, called gli Scopetini, whose convent of S. Donato a Scopeto he had pulled down to strengthen the fortifications of the city. The original convent of the Umiliati, S. Donato a Torri, stood just beyond the Ponte alle Mosse, the bridge over the Mugnone, the first tributary of the Arno west of the city. There, in 1188, the Archbishop of Ravenna first preached the Second Crusade to the Florentines. "In the year of Christ 1188," says Villani, "all Christendom being moved to go to the succour of the Holy Land there came to Florence the Archbishop of Ravenna, the Pope's Legate, to preach the Cross for the said expedition; and many good people of Florence took the cross from the said Archbishop at S. Donato a Torri . . . for the said Archbishop was of the Order of Citeaux (the Cistercian Order of White Benedictines); and this was on the second day of the month of February in the said year, and the Florentines were in such great numbers that they made up an army in themselves over seas. . . ." There the Prior of S. Donato gave to Pazzo de' Pazzi their



leader a glorious banner blazoned with the Cross of the People.

The convent and church, then so famous, have, however, utterly passed away. In 1251, when the Umiliati moved into the city, the buildings came to the Augustinian nuns of S. Casciano a Decimo, and in 1325 they were compelled to abandon it when it fell into the hands of the troops of Castruccio Castracane. They returned, and for their refectory Masaccio painted his famous *Cenacolo*, which the German soldiers of Charles V destroyed during the siege of Florence in 1529. Again the nuns returned, but were suppressed by the French in 1809. Their convent was a few years later bought by Prince Demidoff, who turned it into a palace with an immense park and gardens. His son Anatolio married Princess Mathilde Bonaparte, and upon his wedding day was created Prince of S. Donato, and gave the name of his bride to the villa whose name it bears to this day. There he lived till his divorce, and when he abandoned the place his son Paul restored it and transformed the old church into a library, but he, too, wearied of the place, which is now half abandoned.

I said that the convent of S. Donato in 1325 fell into the hands of Castruccio Castracane, Lord of Lucca. This was after the defeat of Altopascio in the Val di Nievole. Thundering down the Pistojan Way comes Castruccio, behind the flying Florentines, engulfing everything. "Thereafter on the day of S. Francis, the 4th October, he caused

to be run there *palii* from the Ponte alle Mosse even to Peretola, one by folk on horseback, one on foot, and one by prostitutes; nor was there any man so bold that he would issue forth from the city of Florence." These races, run in scorn of the Florentines, were contested here from the bridge-head along the Pistoian Way, past the convent of S. Donato, and must have been especially irksome to the Florentines, because it was their custom upon S. Barnabas day to run races from the Ponte alle Mosse quite through the city by the Porta al Prato to the Porta alla Croce towards Settignano, and this in honour of their great victory over the Aretines at Campaldino in 1289. Indeed, the bridge had its name from this famous *palio*, Ponte alle Mosse meaning the bridge at the starting posts.

Standing upon that famous bridge, which rises so high over the Mugnone and affords a view over the city even so far as Vallombrosa, I considered all these things before I made my way through the old park of Prince Demidoff, and, spying an old and curious tower away to the right, as soon as I could, I made for it. Before I reached it, however, at the four cross-roads I found a wayside shrine, the *Tabernacolo di Antonio Veneziano*, which though spoiled keeps still some lovely frescoes of that master or his pupils, of the Deposition, the Death, and Assumption of the Blessed Virgin and the Last Judgment. Doubtless the floods of Arno, for all this part of the plain near the river is liable

to flood in winter, have spoilt what must once have been perhaps the finest wayside shrine in all this country and is still a delight.

The old tower proved to be the Torre degli Agli, the oldest part of a great and famous villa where both Grand Duke Ferdinand and Grand Duke Cosimo II after him greeted their consorts, Cristina of Lorraine and Maria Maddalena of Austria, a very famous place originally the property of that Messer Barnabà di Giovanni who gave so great a sum towards the building of S. Domenico a Fiesole.

Close by is the old church of S. Maria a Novoli, whose record is one long disaster from flood, so that to-day it is a building mainly of the seventeenth century. Within, however, it still preserves a fine picture of the school of Ghirlandajo, a Madonna and Child enthroned with SS. Peter, Paul, James, and Antony Abbot, and a small painting on a gold ground of the Virgin and Child, a work of the fourteenth century, to say nothing of a fine Crucifix by Gianbologna.

A finer building is the church of S. Cristofano, a mile westward along the Via della Torre degli Agli. This church is still a work of the fifteenth century, with a charming portico beneath which is a large fresco, contemporary with the church, of S. Christopher bearing our Lord on his shoulder; as it says in the song I made years ago:

St. Christopher who bore our Lord  
Across the flood,—O precious load. . . .

The church of S. Cristofano a Novoli really stands in the little town or suburb of Peretola, which it will be remembered was the goal of Castruccio's insolent *palii*, and where indeed he had his camp. The whole place, as indeed are all these villages along the way really as far as S. Donnino, is a part of a long suburb of Florence devoted to straw plaiting. In every doorway the women sit in charming groups just out of the sunshine and the dust, plaiting straw and seeing the world go by, the steam tram from Florence, the *diligenza*, the market carts and country people, herd after herd of goats which are milked in the midst of the narrow way, and indeed the whole pageant of Tuscany.

As might be expected the place is not without history. Before Castruccio descended upon it in 1335, it had given shelter, in 1304, to Cardinal Niccolò da Prato when he fled from Florence after failing to make peace between the Bianchi and Neri, and here the famous Vespucci family, one day to produce the discoverer of America, had its origin.<sup>1</sup> By far the most interesting and beautiful thing left in the busy little place to-day, however, is the parish church of S. Maria Assunta in the piazza. It was apparently the custom that the people of the Florentine *contado*, like those of the city itself, should bring their children to the baptistery of

<sup>1</sup> The Vespucci left Peretola for Borgo Ognissanti early in the thirteenth century, so that Amerigo was not born here but in Florence.

Florence for christening or to the local Pieve. One of the first fonts set up in the churches other than the *pievi* of the *contado* was that within this little church in the last year of the fourteenth century by a bull of Pope Boniface IX. And this especially bears witness to the character of the country in which Peretola stands. It was always subject to flood and therefore might for long be isolated. And so, because in winter Florence often proved to be unapproachable, a font was established here for the sake of the children. The chief movers in this excellent work would seem to have been the Ospedale di S. Maria Nuova, which was founded by Folco Portinari, the father of Dante's Beatrice. This hospital had the patronage of the church of S. Maria in Peretola, and in the middle of the fifteenth century glorified it with the beautiful works it still possesses. It was for the hospital that in 1466 Giusto d'Andrea painted the arms of the Ospedale on the façade, and under the charming portico the fresco of S. Antonio Abate seated *in cattedra* between S. James and S. Egidius. In the lunette over the door is an earlier work of the Madonna and Child with two half-figures of saints, and beneath three small *tondi*. Within, the church has been restored, notably in 1888, but the font set up here in the last year of the fourteenth century, for the sake of the children, remains, a work perhaps of Mino da Fiesole, and a lovely ciborio is from the hand of Francesco di Simone Ferrucci. In the aisle on the gospel side are a Pietà and a lunette

with a half-figure of S. Zanobi, poor frescoes of the fourteenth century. Other frescoes discovered in the chapel of S. Leonardo, founded by the Bishop Leonardo Buonafede in the sixteenth century, represent scenes from the life of S. Leonardo and are from the hand of some follower of Filippino Lippo.

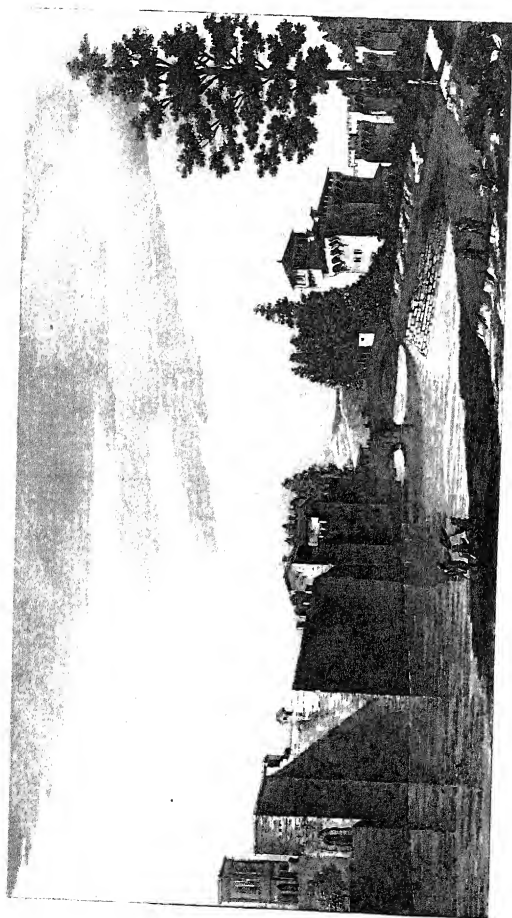
But by far the loveliest and most precious work in the church is the exquisite ciborio of Luca della Robbia behind the high altar. This work, of the purest Renaissance design, consists of a tabernacle with two pilasters supporting a frieze in terra-cotta of cherubim and garlands and an architrave in which is a half-figure of God the Father in benediction. Between the pillars, under a round arch in which is a Pietà, two angels stand holding a marble wreath within which is a bronze relief of the Holy Dove; beneath is a tiny bronze door upon which is a relief of our Lord. This beautiful work, in which Luca has combined bronze and marble and terra-cotta in a delightful harmony, was commissioned by the Ospedale of S. Maria Nuova in 1441, but was originally made for the chapel of S. Luke in S. Maria Nuova.

Behind the *canonica*, beside the church, is a most charming cloister with a polychrome roof upheld by columns. In the midst is a great well. Altogether this is one of the most characteristic and delightful sanctuaries left to us of the fifteenth century anywhere about Florence.

In the piazza of Peretola, once surrounded by

the old houses of the Vespucci, the Spini, and other notables, the Strada Pistoiese turns northward to pass through Campi on the way to Pistoja. The road straight on is the Via Lucchese. This I followed, passing down the dusty ways in the sunshine quite through Peretola and Petriolo, which are really undistinguishable. In the latter the only thing worth notice is the little church of S. Biagio, somewhat to the south of the way, a very ancient foundation, the apse of which, even to-day, dates from the eleventh century, though the rest of the church has been rebuilt, not only in modern times but as the charming portico and the frescoes of the façade assure us, in the fifteenth century. These frescoes are in the manner of Bicci di Lorenzo. There we see the Holy Trinity, the Deposition, and three saints under Gothic canopies, S. Bartholomew, S. James, and S. Nicholas of Bari. Over the side door is a fresco of S. Christopher, and in the lunette over the main doorway is painted the Madonna and Child between S. Biagio and S. Lucia. Beneath are the arms of the Florentine people and those of the Pilli family who anciently possessed much land and many houses here. It is noteworthy how often the figure of S. Christopher appears on the churches upon the road and is evidence, I think, not only of the great and ancient use of the way but of the danger of flood in which all this country lay.

Within, the church of S. Biagio is wholly



*Campi*





modernized; but there remains there a picture of the school of Fra Bartolommeo, in which we see the Madonna enthroned with her little Son and beside her S. John Evangelist, S. Nicholas of Tolentino, S. Luke, and S. Francis of Assisi. Here, too, is a delicious *ciborio* of marble carved with figures of angels which reminds one of the work of Desiderio da Settignano.

Passing through Petriolo, still upon the Via Lucchese, one comes in about half a mile to Quaracchi or, as the Franciscans who there have a famous convent write it, Ad Claras Aquas. This convent is well worth a visit, for though it is a new foundation, it is established in an old villa of the Rucellai built, so it is said, by Leon Alberti. There the friars have set up a great printing press upon which they have already printed the works of Bonaventura, a new edition of Wadding, and many other Franciscan classics, to say nothing of their splendid and learned *Archivum Franciscanum Historicum* which appears four times a year.

Refreshed at Quaracchi I pushed on along the way first to La Sala where, in the very old church of S. Lucia to the north of the great road, I found few memories of antiquity, only an ancient crucifix and two delightful *ciborii*, one of which might have come from the hands of Giuliano da Majano, and then into Brozzi, the most considerable of the *subborghi* of Florence along this highway. There are three *borgate* which bear the name

of Brozzi, each with its own parish church, but the most important is that which depends upon S. Martino. This church is the Pieve of the district. It stands quite at the western end of the little town, to the north of the road, and is similar to the churches of Peretola and Petriolo. Like them it possesses a charming portico beneath which are ruined frescoes; but within it boasts the loveliest of fonts, a beautiful cosmatesque work of marble and mosaic reconstructed, in an hexagonal shape, in the fifteenth century and adorned with an exquisite frieze of cherubim in relief. In the sacristy are two fifteenth-century pictures. These works, fine as they are, may not be compared for a moment, however, with what is to be seen in the church of S. Andrea at Brozzi, where the Strada Lucchese turns northward. This church, largely now a restoration of the seventeenth century, though the campanile is still of the fifteenth, has preserved in spite of rebuilding, almost all its works of art intact. There we see not only a fine Crucifix painted by Giovanni di Francesco, the so-called "Master of the Carrand triptych," with half-figures of God the father on high, the Blessed Virgin, and S. John on either hand, and S. Mary Magdalen at the foot of the Cross, but a splendid picture by Francesco Botticini of the Madonna and Child enthroned between S. James, S. Anthony Abbot, S. Matthias, and S. Minias. Above, in a lunette, is an Annunciation by another hand, and there we read: QUESTA CAPELLA CHON TUTTI

SUOI ORNAMENTI A FACTO FARE SYMO DI DOMENICO  
CECHERELLI PERIMEDIO DE LANIMA SUA NEL  
MCCCCCLXXX.

Here too is a triptych, an early work of the quattrocento, in which we see in the midst the Annunciation with God the Father on high with two angels, and on either side, S. Eustace with his two children and S. Anthony Abbot. Nor is this all, for two frescoes also remain, of which the better is a great work by some pupil of Ghirlandajo's in which we see below the Madonna and Child enthroned between S. Sebastian and S. Julian, and above the Baptism of our Lord; the other is a later work representing two saints, Albert and Sigismund, champions against the fever, as the curious inscription proves: S. ALBERTO DOVOTO DELA FEBRE QUOTIDIANA ET TERZIANA S. SIGISMONDO DOVOTO DELA FEBRE QUARTANA MDLXXX.

Full of all this I turned away at last from S. Andrea a Brozzi to follow the road southward through S. Donnino; and there, at the end of the street to the east of the road, I came to the little church that names the place. Here I found what was to me the most precious work I had seen upon the way from Florence so far; a Giottesque triptych in which, on a gold ground, was painted, in the midst our Lady with Her little Son and beside her S. Anthony Abbot, S. Julian, S. Catherine, and S. Lucy, while on either side were S. Donnino himself and S. John Baptist.

In the predella were scenes from the life of S. Donnino.

It was at S. Donnino that I prepared to cross Arno by the ferry at the Nave di Badia, for I wished especially to visit the Badia a Settimo upon the southern bank. So I made my way down to the river across the railway and presently found myself upon the farther shore, and close to the old abbey. This, though a ruin, is one of the most interesting places in the Florentine plain. It was founded first of all as a Benedictine abbey and that by the Marquis Ugo in the tenth century, if we may believe Villani. At any rate, it seems to have been established by that family and was, apparently, as its name suggests, and as Villani asserts, the seventh abbey they founded in Italy, the first, certainly founded by Marquis Ugo's mother, being the Badia of Florence. The foundation of these abbeys, according to Villani, was due to a vision the Marquis Ugo beheld at Bonsollazzo. "It came to pass," says Villani, "as it pleased God that when he was riding to the chase in the country of Bonsollazzo, he lost sight in the wood of all his followers, and came out as he supposed at a workshop where iron was wont to be wrought. Here he found men, black and deformed, who, in place of iron, seemed to be tormenting men with fire and with hammer, and he asked what this might be; and they answered and said that these were damned souls, and that to similar pains was condemned the soul of the Mar-

quis Ugo by reason of his worldly life, unless he should repent; who, in great fear, commended himself to the Virgin Mary, and when the vision was ended he remained so pricked in the spirit that after his return to Florence he sold all his patrimony in Germany and commanded that seven monasteries should be founded; the first was the Badia of Florence to the honour of S. Mary; the second was that of Bonsollazzo, where he beheld his vision; the third was founded at Arezzo; the fourth at Poggibonizzi, the fifth at Verruca of Pisa, the sixth at the city of Castello; the last was the one at Settimo. . . .”

The abbey, according to Vasari, thus founded for the Benedictines by the Marquis Ugo seems soon to have passed into the gift of the Counts of Borgonuovo, who established the Cluniac Congregation there. Later we find the abbey in the hands of the Vallombrosans, and it was there, upon 13th February 1068, that with the consent of the founder of this Congregation, if not by his order, was held the famous ordeal by fire. It befell in this way. The reform inaugurated by S. Giovanni Gualberto when he founded the Vallombrosan Congregation especially aimed at bringing to an end the simony so common in all Italy, and not least in Florence, where Bishop Pietro da Pavia was especially guilty, for it was said that he had bought the see by bribery. The people sided with S. Giovanni and his monks, and the battle raged fiercely for five years till the Bishop,

enraged, made an armed attack upon the monastery of S. Salvi, outside the Porta alla Croce of Florence. S. Giovanni happened to be absent, but his monks were injured and the altars razed to the ground. So high did popular excitement rise that more than a thousand persons preferred to die unassailed rather than to receive the last sacraments from priests ordained by such a Bishop. In vain Pope Alexander II sent S. Pier Damiano to reconcile the Florentines with their church. Rome itself was distrusted, and nothing would content them but a judgment of God. They demanded the ordeal by fire. Then it was that Guglielmo, Count of Borgonuovo, offered S. Giovanni an arena at the Badia di Settimo. As his champion, S. Giovanni chose a certain Pietro of Vallombrosa who, according to some, was the cowherd of the monastery, according to others, a man of noble birth of the family of Aldobrandeschi of Sovana, but who thereafter was known as S. Pietro Igneo. The Bishop refused the contest, but that gained him little, for Pietro declared his readiness to pass through the fire alone. On 13th February 1068 a vast crowd of men, women, and children set forth in procession from Florence chanting prayers and litanies for Settimo. There by the Badia two pyres of wood were lighted so close together that none might without miracle pass between them unhurt. Yet Pietro passed and that unscorched. And the crowd precipitated itself upon him that it might kiss but the hem of his

robe, and he was only rescued with great difficulty. The news spread. In Rome the Pope was compelled to act. The Bishop of Florence entered into a monastery, while Pietro Igneo was made Cardinal-Bishop of Albano, and after his death raised to the altar. There upon the gates of the old abbey we may still read the inscription:

IGNEUS HIC PETRUS MEDIOS PERTRANSIT IGNES  
FLUMINARUM VICTOR, SED MAGIS HAERESEOS.  
HOC IN LOCO MIRACULO S. JOANNIS GUALBERTI,  
QUIDAM FUERE CONFUNDATI HAERETICI MLXX.

Thus the abbey became very famous. It was of course by far the richest and most important centre in this part of the Florentine plain and owned very considerable properties all about. Indeed, it seems to have become so powerful that in 1236 Pope Gregory IX turned out the older Order and gave the place to the Cistercians, who held it for five hundred years, till 1782, when it was suppressed. They, farmers as they were, soon made themselves useful, establishing mills and draining the low lands so subject here to flood, and embanking the river. In return for their public works they were exempt from all taxes and indeed were appointed by the commune of Florence to administer all this country.

In their day the abbey was certainly a very formidable place, entirely surrounded by walls with towers at the four angles, the beautiful gate-tower we have still, being, however, all that



remains of their work. There a relief of our Lord with two saints, dating from 1236, still commemorates in an inscription their advent.

The oldest church of the three which have stood in this place was engulfed in the ooze and mud. A chapel, half sunk already but still conserving traces of frescoes, is all that remains of its successor. But the church we have, though it too has sunk considerably, for it once stood high above the plain and was reached by a great flight of steps, is the Cistercian building of the thirteenth century, and its noble campanile, circular below, a hexagonal above, would seem to belong to the same time. It has been wrongly ascribed to Niccolò Pisano. Within, the church is bare, only keeping, of all its works of art, a Robbia frieze of cherubim about the choir and a beautiful *ciborio* in the chapel in the north aisle, a work of Desiderio da Settignano.

One leaves this desolate abbey always with regret. It seems to stand altogether for that old Italy which is so fast passing away before the hurrying footsteps of the new kingdom so eager for riches and for fame.

Through the early afternoon sunshine I made my way through the *poderi* towards the strangely gaunt tower of the Pieve di Settimo, more than half a mile southward towards the smiling hills. Here are a coloured relief in terra-cotta of the Madonna and Child, called the Madonna de' Fiori, in a charming tabernacle, perhaps by Antonio Rossellino; a beautiful *ciborio* in marble carved

with exquisite *figurini*, perhaps by Giuliano da Majano; and two pictures, one a fourteenth-century work of S. Julian by Masolino,<sup>1</sup> the other of the fifteenth century representing S. Sebastian and S. Roch and above God the Father. Close by in the Pieve di S. Giuliano a Settimo is a charming bas-relief of the Madonna and Child of the school of Donatello.

Just above this great old church I came to the Via Pisana. I crossed it and made southward still by the by-ways for the hills, being intent upon the church of S. Martino alla Palma with its beautiful loggia or portico, set there so finely on its little platform over the olives and vines of the plain. Before entering in I turned to look over the great valley which lay before me in all its vastness from Signa in the west to Florence and her hills in the east, from Prato and Monte Morello northward to the river and the hill-side on which I stood with the Badia a Settimo beneath me.

S. Martino, in a special way, belonged to the Badia a Settimo, for it was not only given to the abbey in the tenth century, but until the suppression in 1785 was served by the monks. In all its beauty it is worthy of the Order which everywhere in Europe contrived loveliness out of savagery and barbarism, at Settimo as at Tintern and at Cleeve. Nor, though they have gone, have they left nothing behind them. Here in this beautiful

<sup>1</sup> This picture, identified and published by Prof. R. Offner, is now in the Uffizi.

sanctuary there is undoubtedly the most wonderful work in all this part of the Val d'Arno, an altogether lovely picture by Bernardo Daddi of Madonna with our little Lord in her arms, an absolutely genuine and certain work by that exquisite master. Nor is this all, for here, too, is a fine fifteenth-century *ciborio*. On the wall of one of the houses near by is a fine and very important bas-relief of the Madonna and Child by Michelozzo Michelozzi.

I lingered a long time at S. Martino, so fair is it and so fine the prospect, and then, as the sun was about to hide behind the great hills of Carrara, visible hence towards evening, I made my way slowly through the quietness at the end of the day, by the by-way past the great villa of Castel Pulci, on past Monte Cascioli, of old an important fortress of the Conti Cadolinghi, and so between the vines and olives by a winding road up and down hill to the little church of S. Maria a Castagnolo, just above the Pisan Way. Here I lingered a little, while the priore showed me a beautiful triptych of the S. Maria Assunta giving her girdle to S. Thomas, while S. Augustine, S. Andrew, S. John Baptist, and S. Anthony stand on guard, and a charming relief of Robbia ware.

Then I went on down to the highway, and lingering there by the Ponte a Greve I failed to find again that shrine at the eastern end of the bridge I knew so well in old days, now departed. It was painted by Bicci di Lorenzo in 1453, and there one saw our

Lady with Her little Son between S. Luke, who tells us all we know of her, and S. John Baptist, who played with our Lord at Her knee, S. Andrew who was Her Son's apostle, and S. Anthony Abbot, who is the guardian of stables, such as that in which She brought forth our Lord, and of all those dear beasts who stood by, so careful in the winter midnight. Such a place by the wayside was meant to receive the prayers of travellers. It has been bricked up. And so I went on to Ponte a Signa sorrowful.

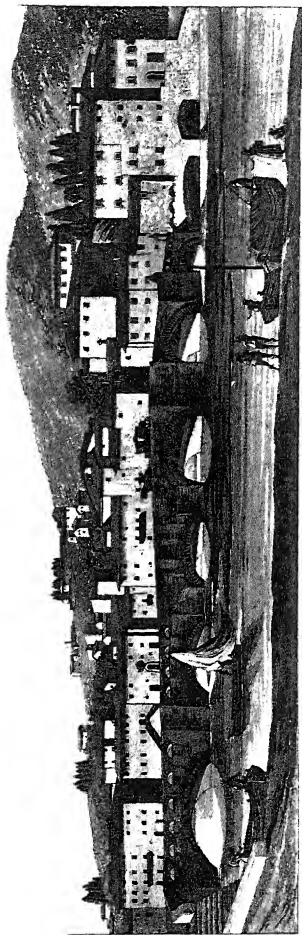
## XI

### THE GONFOLINA

IT IS AT SIGNA THAT ONE COMES TO THE GREATEST of those passes upon the Arno which so definitely divide the river into its six basins; the Stretto di Gonfolina, a precipitous and narrow gorge some twelve *chilometri* in length, which winds between the heights of Monte Albano on the north and the watershed between the Val d'Arno and the Val di Pesa on the south. This pass or gorge, the only entrance to or exit from the Florentine plain, the Val d'Arno Fiorentino, upon the west is, rightly understood, the sea gate of Florence, and as such of major importance to the city.

That its immense importance was always recognized, that it was always strongly held either by Florence herself or by her enemies, is not only recorded for us in the chronicles, but is obvious to us to-day, for we may still see the ruins of five great fortresses each of which dominated the pass, two at the eastern entrance, Lastra and Signa, two at the western exit, Montelupo and Capraja, and one on the hills to the south, Malmantile, a true castello even to-day, a walled and fortified village.

It will perhaps be asked why we find here five



*Ponte di Signa*



fortresses holding a pass already so strong by nature that it might seem one properly furnished and held would have easily commanded it. The answer to that question does not lie in the major importance of the Stretto di Gonfolina, though it held the road to the sea, it lies first in the history of the *contado* of Florence and then in the political geography of this great gate.

To begin with, until the earlier years of the twelfth century even the Florentine entrance into the pass was not in the hands of Florence, but of the Conti Cadolinghi, those Conti di Borgonuovo whose chief seat was at Fucecchio in the Val d'Arno Inferiore. They held a vast territory which stretched almost to the gates of Florence, and to hold this and the eastern entrance of the Gonfolina they built two fortresses, one at Monte Cascioli, close to Castel Pulci, and the other on Monte Orlando, and it was not till 1113 that the Republic took these and destroyed them. The whole of the Val d'Arno Fiorentino that the Counts had held then came into her power, and in order to hold it at the crucial point, this entrance of the Stretto di Gonfolina, she built three fortresses, one at Lastra a Gangalandi called Castelvecchio, above Lastra a Signa, later dismantled when, about 1380, the *borgo* of Lastra itself was fortified, another at Signa on the right bank of the river, and the last at Malmantile on the summit of the southern hills.

We find Florence thus building three fortresses



here at the eastern end of the Gonfolina when one might seem to have been enough. Why?

For two reasons. It is obvious that she only held the eastern entrance of the pass; she did not hold the western exit. That was commanded by the Castello of Capraja, the fortress of the Counts of that name, and Florence was not able to subdue them till 1203, for nearly a hundred years, that is, after she possessed herself of the Cadolinghi fortresses at the eastern entrances of the pass. The road through the pass was therefore not in her command, she only held one end of it, and while this was so, that narrow way under the precipitous hills was too dangerous for her use.

The most ancient highway between Florence and Pisa, between Florence and the sea that is, did not therefore run through the Gonfolina; it crossed the hills to the south, climbed the watershed of the valley of the Arno, descended into the valley of the Pesa, where Montelupo now stands. To hold this road she built the Castello of Malmantile right across it, so that the road enters by the eastern gate and leaves by the western. Her way was thus fairly secure. Upon the road where it began to climb the hills, at the entrance of the Gonfolina, which was thus closed, she built the fortress of Lastra a Gangalandi; upon the height, to defend it, she built the Castello of Malmantile; her intention is obvious. But why did she also build and maintain the Castello of Signa opposite that of Lastra? It did not hold the pass, the way

through which was upon the other side of the river; between it and the Via Pisana the Arno flowed. Why did she make such an effort and go to such an expense?

The answer is again twofold. Here, between Gangalandi and Signa, was a bridge, the only bridge over the Arno between Florence and Pisa; while the gorge of the Gonfolina was necessary to the safety of the Republic for other purposes than that of an exit.

Signa itself was both ancient and important. It had many natural advantages; its position upon a hill insulated by the Arno, the Bisenzio, and the Ombrone lent it a considerable natural strength, while, since the Arno was scarcely navigable above the bridge, especially in summer, it came to be the port of Florence. For all these reasons Florence fortified and maintained it when, having broken the Cadolinghi, she came at last into possession of the eastern entrance of the Gonfolina.

We see the truth of this when we consider the history of Signa; far older than Gangalandi, her whole story is concerned with the preservation of the river, the keeping of the bridge, the prevention of floods. To give an instance of this: in the year 1325 Castruccio Castracane, of Lucca, perhaps the most formidable enemy Florence ever had, came, after defeating the Florentines at Altopascio, into Val d'Arno burning and slaying. He made his head-quarters at Signa, and the whole

of Villani's chronicle for that year is full of his doings. For a whole year he went all over the Florentine *contado* right up to the walls of the city from which no man dared issue forth, burning and destroying, till there can indeed have been little left. Only the city of Florence he could not take. In the very end of that year an attempt was at last made by the Florentines to seize the fortress of Signa, the only one left standing in the *contado*, in the absence of Castruccio. Upon 30th January Messer Piero di Narsi, Captain of War in Florence, suddenly rode to Signa with four hundred knights, but he accomplished nothing, returning at evening. Nevertheless, Castruccio, fearing to lose Signa, returned in person with seven hundred horse and two thousand foot, and on the 19th of February rode to Torri in Val di Pesa and ruined and burnt that place, and on the 22nd of February he rode to San Casciano and burnt the *borgo* and all the *contrada*, and at evening returned towards Signa, but was met and attacked by Messer Piero di Narsi, nor did he get into Signa without loss. This befell at Lastra; but Castruccio was not baffled, for to shame and annoy the Florentines he appeared at Peretola, close to the city, three days later with eight hundred horse and three thousand foot. He did nothing but display his forces and then returned to Signa, but no one had dared issue out of Florence. Then on the 28th February he prepared to depart, having done all the damage he could. Gathering all his people he committed

the last and greatest outrage, he burnt Signa and *cut the bridge over the Arno*, and rode away to Carmignano.

Why did he leave Signa? Because he had done all the damage he could, though not all he wished. He had occupied Signa at first with the intention of there blocking the Arno with a wall across the eastern entrance of the Gonfolina, and thus drowning the city of Florence. It was to hide the work of his engineers that he continually appeared before the walls of Florence, thus keeping all within the walls lest they should discover his intention, and it was the fear that they were discovered which brought him back so hard upon the heels of Piero di Narsi. He failed, though not by any act of the Florentines. His engineers found that the fall of the Arno between Florence and Signa was one hundred and fifty *braccia*, and that therefore the attempt was impossible.<sup>1</sup>

Nothing could show us better than this attack of Castruccio upon Florence in the fourteenth century the secret of Signa. Certainly the truth was not lost upon the Florentines. In the following year, 1326, less than eight months after Castruccio had departed, they, on the 14th September, determined to repair and to fortify not only Signa, but also Gangalandi, and that toward the plain, and this was done. Signa was walled with strong walls and with high and noble houses and forts by the Commune of Florence, and certain immunity and

<sup>1</sup> See Villani, Lib. IX, caps 303-338, especially 338.

favour was accorded to those *terrazzini* who should build houses there.

Of these old heroic fortifications what remains? Only a few broken houses and an old wall with two great gates upon the hill over the modern town. In Signa, indeed, there is little or nothing to see, and but for its story and perhaps the beautiful loggia with its old columns in the piazza there, the place would scarce be worth a visit, for few would come for the sake of Beata Giovanna, the little shepherdess-saint of the place, whose relics remain in the Pieve of S. Maria a Signa,<sup>1</sup> where there are frescoes by Bicci di Lorenzo.

To reach Lastra a Gangalandi from Signa, it is necessary to cross the great bridge over the Arno—the successor to that which Castruccio destroyed. This bridge has played, as I have tried to show, a very great part in the history of Signa and gave, indeed, most its importance to the castello. To-day, and indeed from early times, it names the *borgo* at the end of it upon the left bank of the river, Ponte a Signa, between the bridge head and Lastra. The origin of the *borgo* does not date farther back than 1252. In that year the Cistercians of the Badia a Settimo obtained, on the 11th of August, permission to build on the left bank of Arno a weir of rushes half-way across the river to serve some mills that they possessed a little lower down under Gangalandi, at a place called Ponticello. We thus

<sup>1</sup> See my *Country Walks about Florence*, for Beata Giovanna. (Methuen, 1923, third edition.)

see that there was a bridge here, perhaps only of wood, in the middle of the thirteenth century. This *Ponticello*, which perhaps in its foundations dated from 1120 when a certain S. Alluccio had obtained permission from the Bishop of Florence to build it for wayfarers, was already ruined in 1278, and because there was then no road across the river, the church of S. Martino a Gangalandi, within the *piviere* of S. Maria a Signa, was allowed to build a font of its own so that the children born on the left bank here could be properly baptized. In 1287, however, the bridge had been rebuilt, probably by the Cistercians. The Stretto di Gonfolina was then full of the artificial weirs of the monks, and though Florence had long tried to obtain and to demolish these, for they greatly added to the danger of flood, it was not till after the disastrous inundation of 1333, when the whole Florentine plain was under water, that she was able to achieve her purpose.

The bridge built by the Cistercians was, as I have said, destroyed by Castruccio. It was certainly repaired in 1326 and has many times since been restored and rebuilt, in 1405 and in 1479—and this is of the greatest interest—because its little arches did not leave enough room for the larger boats to pass. In 1836 it was heightened and broadened for the last time.

There is nothing to see in the *borgo* of Ponte a Signa, and not very much in the castello, or walled village, of Lastra to the east of it upon the Via Pisana.

The Castello della Lastra probably owes its very foundation to the incursion of Castruccio, but it does not seem to have been entirely walled and fortified till more than forty years later when the Pisans, with Sir John Hawkwood and his English company, sacked and burnt it in 1365. It seems to have been after this that Florence finally deserted her old and ineffective fortress of Castelvecchio, about half a mile away towards Gangalandi, and surrounded Lastra which, till then, had been a mere *borgo*, with walls, towers, and a ditch; and this about 1380. The later walls of stone, with bastions, towers, and three gates, Porta Fiorentina, Porta Pisana, and il Portone di Baccio, all bearing the arms of the Commune, the People, and the Parte Guelfa, were built by the famous Filippo di Ser Brunellesco, the architect of S. Maria del Fiore.

This walled village is a poor but flourishing little place to-day, still possessing more than one building of interest. Among these is the Oratorio di S. Maria della Misericordia in the Corso Vittorio Emanuele. This is of very ancient foundation, but it was rebuilt in 1404, and to that time the beautiful doorway still belongs. Within, over the high altar, is a thirteenth-century panel of the Madonna and Child of considerable interest. To the fifteenth century, here in Lastra, belongs also the Loggia di S. Antonio, in the Via della Pretura. This was a hospital of S. Anthony built in 1411 by the Arte della Seta of Florence according to the will of Francesco di Leccio da S. Miniato.

It is a delightful and characteristic work of the time, covered with polychrome ornament, and the arms of the founder and of the Arte still remain upon it. In the lunette over the door is a fresco perhaps by Bicci di Lorenzo, who lived above Lastra in the Villa Sassoforte, representing the Madonna and Child with two praying angels.

In this same street, the Via della Pretura, is a charming tabernacle or shrine covered with frescoes spoilt by time and weather. Within we still see Our Lady with her little Son in her lap between S. John Baptist and S. Francesco. At the sides are ruined figures of four saints, and in the lunette above God the Father in benediction. Without is the Annunciation. These seem to be works of the sixteenth century in the manner of Fra Bartolommeo.

In the modern Palazzo Comunale is an interesting sixteenth-century picture—interesting only for what it represents. There we see the Patron Saints of the five *popoli* which constituted the League and Commune of Gangalandi—the Madonna and Child stand for S. Maria a Lamole, S. Martin for Gangalandi itself, S. Michael for Monte Orlando and Lastra, S. Stephen for Calcinaja, S. Peter for Selva a Malmantile. Another and modern work represents Charles VIII of France receiving the Signoria of Florence in the Palagio delle Terre near Ponte a Signa.

But by far the most interesting thing to be found hereabout is not in the Castello of Lastra at



all, but at Gangalandi, its predecessor. Upon the hill above Ponte a Signa, covered with vineyards and olive gardens, stands the beautiful church of S. Martino a Gangalandi. Near by, of old, was the ancient palace of the League and Commune of Gangalandi, of which Lastra itself formed a part. This is gone, but the church remains dating, in its foundation, before the year 1000, but as we see it, mainly a rebuilding of the late sixteenth century. In the last years of the twelfth century it was served by a chapter of canons living in common under a provost. It was the title of this office which, in 1466, was enjoyed by Leon Battista Alberti, to whom we thus owe, in all probability, the present choir and chancel; but except this and the baptistery, the church is of the sixteenth century; the baptistery, as we have seen, having been granted to it in 1278, though, as we see it, it is a building of 1423.

S. Martino stands upon the hill-side and before it stretches a great platform or terrace, whence there is to be had one of the finest views in all Val d'Arno. Eastward one looks up the valley as far as the Duomo of Florence and away to the hills of Fiesole and Settignano. Northward across the plain you may find Prato under the great walls of Monte Calvana and to the left Monte Morello; nearer, but over the river, Signa lies on her beautiful hill-side crowned by her ruined castello half lost in her vineyards and olive gardens, while on this side stands the great

Villa delle Selve of the Strozzi, where Chiara de' Medici-Strozzi died.

From all that marvellous and shining beauty you turn half-reluctantly to S. Martino, but with an ever increasing enthusiasm. Under the noble portico before the church, upon the wall against which, within, the baptistery is built, is a spoiled fresco of St. Christopher with Bambino Gesù on his shoulder, for S. Martino looked all across the great marshes of Arno above the ancient ford. This work probably dates from about 1430.

Immediately within on the right under a loggia, painted all in fresco by Bicci di Lorenzo about 1430, stands the baptistery, partitioned, as it were, from the church which owns it by so curious a chance. There we see over the arches of the loggia, looking into the nave, S. Martin himself dividing his cloak with the beggar, and beneath the Annunciation, while over the arches towards the high altar is the figure of our Lord surrounded by angels. Under the roof of the loggia are to be seen the Four Evangelists and Doctors of the Church. The font itself is a work of the same period as the loggia which encloses it and the frescoes. It is decorated with some charming reliefs of S. Martin, the Baptism of our Lord, the Madonna and Child, and bears the following inscription: QUESTA FONTE ANNO FACTO FARE GLI OPERAI DELLA COMPAGNIA DELLA VERGINE MARIA, AN MCCCCXXIII.

Upon the other side of the nave is the tomb of

old Agnolo Pandolfini, and over the altar beside it a sixteenth-century picture, of the school of Bronzino, of the Holy Virgins, while over the third altar upon this side of the nave is a work by some unknown master of the sixteenth century, of the Madonna and Child enthroned between two saints, one of which is S. Stephen. Far better than these sophisticated, if noble, works are the two little panels on a gold ground of the Annunciation on the wall on the gospel side of the high altar by some trecento master, and the late trecento picture, now spoiled by repaint, of the Madonna and Child, upon the epistle side.

One returns, not without reluctance, from S. Martino to Ponte a Signa, so fair is it and so quiet, to pass on one's way through the winding Gonfolina, the sea gate of Florence, the steep and narrow gorge between the hills eastward. Before setting out thus for Montelupo and the plain and town of Empoli, however, he is wise who with plenty of time on his hands climbs by the old road over the hills southward to Malmantile.

I have said that until Florence held both the entrance and exit of the Gonfolina pass, her highway to Pisa and the sea did not run through the gorge but over the hills to the south of it, between the Florentine plain and the plain of Empoli. That road was held and guarded by the Castello of Malmantile, which still in great part remains.

The traveller will notice, not without interest I think, that outside the Porta Pisana of Lastra a

road suddenly turns southward and climbs slowly into the hills under the convent of S. Lucia. This road is paved and is the old *Strada maestra e postale* which Florence used until she was in full possession of the Stretto di Gonfolina. Upon the highest parts of the road, quite in the hills, about the middle of the twelfth century, the Republic built the Castello of Malmantile to hold this way which then, I think, ran right through it from east to west, though to-day it passes close under the northern wall. By the year 1424 the castello was in ruin and we read in a document cited by Repetti that the ten *Provveditori* of the cities and *contadi* of Pisa, Pistoja, Volterra, and other places then subject to the Florentine dominion complained to the Signoria of the state of the place and that, in its incomplete condition, it served rather to damage than to defend the Commune by reason, I suppose, that it was then a refuge for robbers and highwaymen. It was resolved to rebuild it; but the state of this stronghold in the first years of the fifteenth century would seem to bear witness to the fact that the main high road no longer ran over these hills, but passed through the gorge of the Gonfolina below.

The ruined great walls of the castello are picturesque enough to-day beside the deserted road, and full of peasants and their children, but the great sight here is the noble view westward which gives you all the plain of Empoli and Pisa even as far as the sea. There lies Empoli and the

great stronghold of S. Miniato al Tedesco and Fucecchio of the Cadolinghi, while far and far away rise the marble mountains of Carrara shining in the sun, and between them and you the famous Monti Pisani.

It is very well worth while passing a little farther westward down the hill upon which Malmantile stands to visit the old parish church, S. Pietro in Selva, the parish church of Malmantile. The building is quite modern save for its façade, which still preserves frescoes of the fourteenth century of S. Francis receiving the Stigmata, of S. Augustine and S. Ambrose, and of S. Christopher with our Lord on his shoulder by Bicci di Lorenzo; while within is a beautiful Giottesque Crucifix, spoiled in the seventeenth century. In a little shrine beside the church is a fine painting of S. Peter, a Florentine work of the fifteenth century.

Here, too, under Malmantile, you may best see the hills that lie on the other side of Arno to the west of Signa. They are wild enough, and save for their beauty have little interest. No road served them, and their approach was never from Val d'Arno, over which they rose so steeply in that narrow gorge of the Gonfolina, but from the north from Poggio a Cajano and Carmignano, for instance, whence it is easy to see the one treasure they possess, the glorious Villa Ferdinanda of Artimino, which grew the famous wine Francesco Redi names as better than that of Avignon in his poem, *Bacchus in Tuscany*.

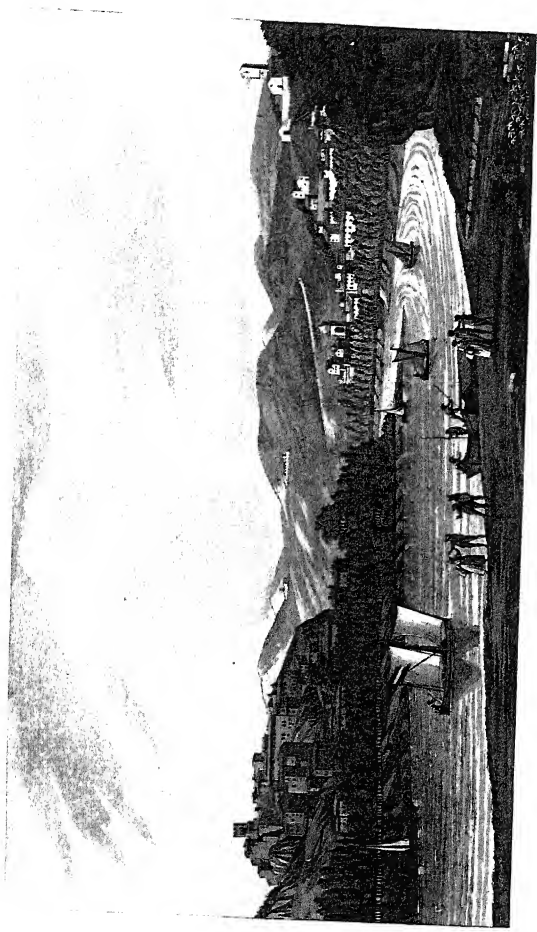
After a morning upon the hills one returns to Lastra to set out by the road through the Gonfolina pass by the river for Montelupo and Empoli. In the very mouth of the gorge towering over the road stands the vast mass of stone known as *il Masso delle Fate*, a single block weighing many tons. One passes on upon the great road over the left bank of the river, and presently comes to Porto di Mezzo. This of old was known as *Mezzana sotto Signa*, the word *mezzana* signifying an island in the midst of a river. Here indeed there was once such an island, but it has long since disappeared. With its disappearance *Mezzana* changed its name and took that of *Porto di Sotto*, for it was a not unimportant port upon the river, though never so considerable as the *Porto Maggiore*, as *Signa* was called. There, in the dry summer weather, when the river was low, the boats from *Pisa* loaded and unloaded their merchandise. *Porto di Mezzo*, as it is now called, without much significance, is not the only place of interest in the *Gonfolina*. Upon this same left bank of the river stands the smiling village of *Brucianese*, whence sprang the *Pandolfini*, the most famous of whom lies in *S. Martino a Gangalandi*. In the woods above is the little church of *S. Maria a Lamole*. Within, over the altar on the epistle side, is a *Pietà* with *SS. Mary Magdalen, Francis*, and others in a fine landscape where we see the *Maries* at the tomb of our Lord: this by some pupil of *Neri di Bicci*. The *predella* is later.

Over the altar on the gospel side is a most sweet Madonna and Child with angels by some unknown master of the fifteenth century.

Upon the right bank, opposite Brucianese, stands the village of Poggio alla Malda, which also has in its church of S. Stefano a charming picture of the fifteenth century, while beyond, in the hills, lies the old *badia* of S. Martino in Campo. But the villages are few within the gorge, for there was no way out but by leave of the fortresses at either end, and these were always in strong and unscrupulous hands.

As we have seen, it was first the Cadolinghi who held the eastern entrance of the pass. They were broken in 1107 and 1113. It was the Counts of Capraja who held the western exit, and that for near a hundred years after the Cadolinghi were disposed of. They were all keen Guelfs, while the Cadolinghi were Ghibellines.

The Castello di Capraja stood upon the right or northern bank of Arno and easily commanded the pass. Therefore, though they held the eastern entrance as early as 1113, the Florentines still used the road over the southern hills, which Malmantile defended, for, with Capraja in hostile hands, the pass was not secure. This road by Malmantile descended again into Val d'Arno just beyond the Gonfolina, where the Pesa flows into Arno, and to command the passage of that river as well as to defend the upper road, where it came once more into the valley, the Florentines built the fortress



*Montelupo and Capraja*





of Montelupo, certainly not without an eye to Capraja, for it faced it from the southern bank of Arno and, as the old rhyme has it,

Per diſtrugger queſta Capra  
Non ci vuol altro che un Lupo.

In the little war with Pistoja in 1203, however, Montelupo showed signs of disaffection, and Villani tells us that that year it was destroyed "because it would not obey the Commune." It was rebuilt in the following year and continued to hold the way. In the year 1249, when for a moment the Ghibellines were in control of Florence, the Guelf exiles took refuge in the fortress of Capraja. Then, as Villani tells us, the Emperor Frederick II "came into Tuscany and found that the Ghibelline party which was ruling the city of Florence had laid siege in the month of March to the fortress of Capraja, wherein were the leaders of the chief families of Guelf nobles exiled from Florence. . . . He would not enter into the city of Florence, nor ever had entered therein, but was ware of it since by soothsayers or by the sayings of some demon in prophecy he had discovered that he should die in Firenze,<sup>1</sup> wherefore he feared greatly. Nevertheless he came to the army, and went to sojourn in the castle of Fucecchio, and left the greater part of his followers at the siege of Capraja, which stronghold being straitly besieged, and having scanty provisions, was not able to hold out longer,

<sup>1</sup> He died at Firenzuola in Apulia.

and the besieged held council about coming to parley and they would have been granted any liberal terms they desired, but a certain shoemaker, an exile from Florence, who had been a leading ancient, not being invited to the said Council, came to the gate very wrathful, and cried to the host that the town could hold out no longer, for the which thing the host would not consent to treat, wherefore they within, as dead men, surrendered themselves to the mercy of the Emperor. And this was in the month of May in the year of Christ 1249. And the captains of the said Guelfs were Count Ridolfo of Capraja and Messer Rinieri Zingane of the Buondelamonti. And when they came to Fucecchio to the Emperor, he took them all with him prisoners to Apulia, and afterwards by reason of letters and ambassadors sent to him by the Ghibellines of Florence he put out all the eyes of those which belonged to the great noble families in Florence and then drowned them in the sea save Messer Rinieri Zingane, because he found him so wise and great of soul that he would not put him to death, but he put out his eyes, who afterwards ended his life as a monk on the island of Montecristo. And the aforesaid shoemaker was spared by the besiegers; and when the Guelfs had returned to Florence, he also returned thither and, being recognized in the parliament at the outcry of the people, he was stoned and vilely dragged along the ground by the children and thrown into the moat."

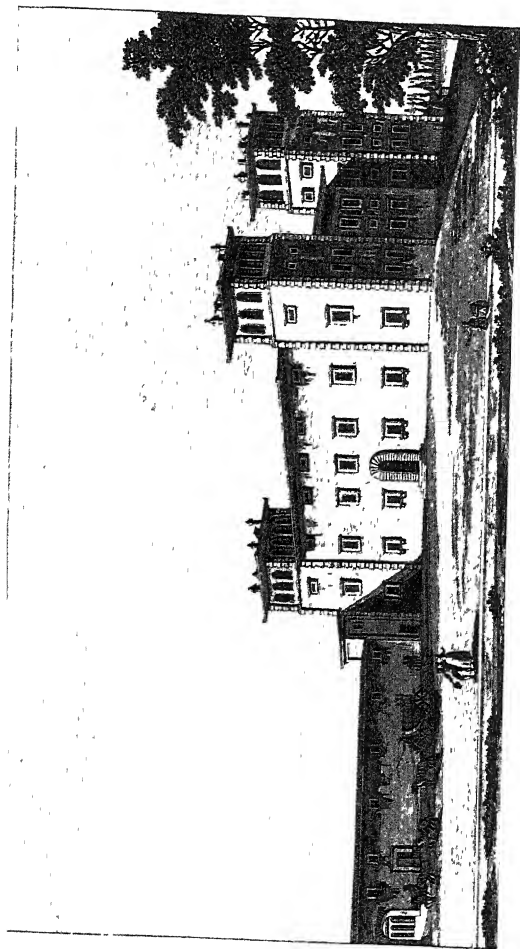
The blinding and massacre of those Florentine nobles is not the only inhuman crime of the Emperor Frederick which we shall come upon in this valley. Because of his sins and rebellion against the Holy See this man has become the hero of the Protestant historians and our modern writers, who have found it convenient to forget his crimes against humanity.

The fall of Capraja in 1249 was the end of that fortress, and with its destruction the whole pass, with both its entrance and exit, came into the hands of Florence. Montelupo was rebuilt to hold the western exit, and from that time the highway between Florence and the sea forsook the southern hills and passed through the gorge of the Gonfolina. The sea gate was now altogether in the hands of the Republic. Malmantile, scarcely finished, was allowed to decay and never repaired until, as I have said, in 1429 the *provveditori* of Pisa, Pistoja, Volterra, and other places within the dominion of Florence complained to the Republic that the ruin it then was offered an asylum to the bandits of the hills, who would descend thence and hold up the caravans upon the lower road.

There is nothing to see in Capraja, picturesque and wonderful though it be, but the ruin of the old castello, and scarcely more in the busy little town of Montelupo opposite on the southern bank of the Arno. The place was once famous for its pottery, but though still busy with it it is no longer pre-eminent. In the church of S. Gio-

vanni Evangelista, however, now the Pieve, but once with its sister, S. Quirico, suffragan to the ancient Pieve of S. Ippotilo in Val di Pesa, a beautiful building of the eleventh century still standing to the south of Montelupo and well worth a visit for its own sake and that of its fifteenth-century *ciborio*, there is a noble picture of the school of Botticelli, in which we see the Madonna and Child enthroned between S. John Evangelist, S. Roch, S. Lorenzo, and S. Sebastian. Below, in the predella, are certain *tondi* in which are half-figures of our Lord, S. Buonaventura, S. Francis, S. Jerome, and another, with two scenes from the life of S. Lorenzo; a noble altar-piece. Behind the high altar, too, is a very beautiful trecento Coronation of the Virgin with saints and angels, of the school of Bicci di Lorenzo.

The road over the hills through Malmantile comes down through the town and joins the Via Pisana which has come through the gorge of the Gonfolina, and both go on together by the old bridge over the Pesa across the opening plain to Empoli. There is little of much interest on the way. Close to Montelupo stands the great Villa dell' Ambrogiana, a four-square towered building standing up over the river behind the poplars on the left bank where the stream turns suddenly northward. It was built by Ferdinando de' Medici as a hunting lodge, and there, in 1592, Ferdinando's Donna Eleanora Orsini was married to Federigo Sforza, Duke of Segni. The place often served, too, as a



*Villa dell' Ambrogiana*



resting-place and a half-way house between Florence and Pisa. There, for instance, in 1600, Maria de' Medici first rested on her way to become the bride of France, and there, in 1791, Ferdinando III met his bride, Luisa Maria of Bourbon. But the glory is departed, and the Villa dell' Ambrogiana is now a madhouse.

Beyond Montelupo, at the western exit of the Gonfolina, the valley suddenly opens out into the vast plain of Empoli. Away to the right towers Monte Albano, crowned with the towers of S. Alluccio, and there stands the ancient eleventh-century church of S. Giusto. It stands over Val d'Arno far away, but upon the road here on the left bank one passes village after village. First Torre, then Fibbiana, which has in its church a statue of S. Roch by Giovanni della Robbia, then Cortenuova, whose church of S. Maria still preserves a fresco of the school of the Gaddi; and last of all, Pontormo.

Pontormo, or Pontorme, though now but an open town, was once, that is to say in the twelfth century, a walled castello, but its fortifications were destroyed in 1315. It stands in the plain near the head of the bridge over the Orme torrent, a little before that stream finds the Arno, and the bridge gives the place its name. It was within the lordship of the Counts of Capraja, but as early as 1182 had placed itself under the protection of the Republic of Florence. It boasts two churches, S. Michele within and S. Michele without. The



former still possesses the fourteenth-century font which it obtained of grace after the disastrous and famous flood of 1333, the *piviere* till then having been the Collegiata of Empoli. S. Michele is well worth a visit. At one time in the hands of the Umiliati, when their Order was suppressed in 1571 by Pius V it passed to the famous military Order of the Knights of S. Stephen, whose capital church was in Pisa; and it possesses a fine fourteenth-century font bearing the arms of the Commune and two pictures representing S. John Evangelist and S. Michele Archangel, painted by Jacopo Carrucci, whom we know as Il Pontormo, for he was born here as were other famous men, to wit, the learned Cardinal Laborante, who flourished in the twelfth century, the Cardinal Frate Luca Mazzuoli, and the famous professor of the university of Pisa, Alessandro Marchetti who here saw the light in the sixteenth century.

## XII

### VAL D'ARNO INFERIORE

EMPOLI, S. MINIATO, VINCI, CERRETO GUIDI,  
FUCECCHIO

IT IS IMPOSSIBLE RIGHTLY TO UNDERSTAND Empoli, a great market town, and S. Miniato al Tedesco, the most formidable fortress in Val d'Arno, four miles away south-west upon the hills, without reference to the historical geography of this part of the Val d'Arno, the Val d'Arno Inferiore. It is obvious at once, as soon as one leaves Montelupo, that one has come into another great basin of the river similar to the Piano Fiorentino, for the valley opens beyond the Gonfolina into a vast plain running due west, across which the river zigzags under the northern hills. At Montelupo, guarding the western entrance and exit of the pass, the Pesa comes into Arno from the south; between Empoli and S. Miniato the Elsa also joins the major stream, so that out of the plain of Val d'Arno Inferiore there are three great exits, without counting the great westward way to the sea: the Gonfolina eastward, the Val di Pesa and the Val d'Elsa southward. Of these, by far the most important was Val d'Elsa, for it led to Siena. Perhaps this might be enough to explain the existence of the great fortress of S. Miniato, but

it is not enough to explain the great market of Empoli. Empoli was indeed just that; a market whose name even is derived from its business; it was the emporium of all this part of Val d'Arno, and later came to be actually the granary of Florence. How are we to explain these facts?

The whole secret of the importance of Val d'Arno Inferiore lies in two things, of which the second is by far the more decisive. The Val d'Arno Inferiore was, as it were, the meeting-place of the *contado* of Florence with that of Pisa, and it was here the river was forded by the only great road the Dark Ages created, the way of the Franks into Italy, the Via Francigena, from the north to Rome.

The Via Francigena left the Emilian Way across Lombardy in the territory of Parma, crossed the Apennines by the Cisa pass, descended at Pontremoli into the Lunigiana, whence it passed into Tuscany by Sarzana, Luni, and the Salto della Cervia to Lucca, passed quite through that city and so by Altopascio and Gallena crossed the Colline delle Cerbaje, which is on the right bank of Arno close to the Val d'Arno Inferiore on the west, and descended through Fucecchio to ford the river between S. Miniato and Empoli exactly opposite the mouth of the Val d'Elsa by which, along the eastern bank of that stream, it passed to Siena, and thence to Buonconvento, Bolsena, Montefiascone, Viterbo, and Rome, which it entered by the Porta di Castello.

We have then here a major fact in the historical geography of Val d'Arno Inferiore, a fact which, rightly understood, is responsible for the whole fate of this part of the valley, and which created both the fortress of S. Miniato and the market of Empoli. In brief, S. Miniato is the great fortress dominating and holding the Via Francigena, where it passes to and fro out of Val d'Elsa into Val d'Arno; Empoli is the market at the cross roads where the Via Pisana crossed the Via Francigena. The road is the secret of both, it was the author of their being and the master of their destiny; apart from it they are inexplicable.

Thus stated the truth of this is so obvious that to give instances in which it has manifested itself might seem unnecessary. I will, however, give one. In the year 1311-1312, when Henry of Luxembourg came into Italy to be crowned Emperor at Rome, and at the behest of Dante, as we know, laid siege to Florence, the whole of his progress was changed because the fortress of S. Miniato was not in his hands. On 11th January 1311 Villani tells us that "Henry of Namur, marshall of the Emperor, came by sea to Pisa with but a small following, and two days after sallied forth from Pisa with his men and took station at Pontedera, and all the goods of the Florentines which were coming from Pisa he caused to be captured and taken back to Pisa; whence the Florentines had great loss. For this cause the Florentines sent foot and horse to San Miniato

and the frontier there." Meantime the Emperor arrived in Pisa, but because S. Miniato was in the hands of the Florentines he "took the way of the Maremma," only coming into the Via Francigena at Siena, and so went on to Rome to be crowned. And having been crowned he returned to break the Florentines. He came by the Via Aretina up through Val d'Arno Superiore, and was met at Ancisa, but with no success, and eventually he encamped, as we know, about Florence towards S. Salvi. Presently, because he made no headway, he abandoned the siege and marched off across the Arno hard by Val d'Ema and came to S. Casciano and so to Poggibonsi in Val d'Elsa upon the Via Francigena between S. Miniato and Siena. Thence by a forced march he managed to reach Pisa and set about reducing "sleeplessly" Lucca and S. Miniato and Castelfiorentino, the three strongholds on the Via Francigena not already in his hands. He failed to take any of them, and because he failed had to abandon all northern Tuscany and was on his way southward when he died at Buonconvento on 24th August 1313.

That is but an instance out of many of the importance of S. Miniato. It was a capital fortress in Val d'Arno and it was capital because it held the Via Francigena where it forded the Arno and entered the Val d'Elsa, and where it crossed the way from Florence to Pisa and the sea. A similar though a lesser position was held by Fucecchio, through which the Via Francigena ran. But

Fucecchio was, for the greatest ends, upon the wrong and northern side of the Arno. It scarcely even controlled the ford, and not at all the crossing of the Via Pisana or the entrance into the narrow Val d'Elsa.

Much the same is true of Empoli as of S. Miniato. Its whole importance arose from the fact that it stood at the cross roads on Via Francigena and Via Pisana, where the former crossed the Arno and entered the Val d'Elsa for Siena, the South, and Rome. It was an ideal place for a great market, and such was its chief, if not its whole, character.

This then is the truth about the Val d'Arno Inferiore; its whole character and importance and destiny lay in the fact that in it the great Roman highway crossed the river and the Via Pisana and there entered the narrow valley of the Elsa on the way to Siena and Rome.

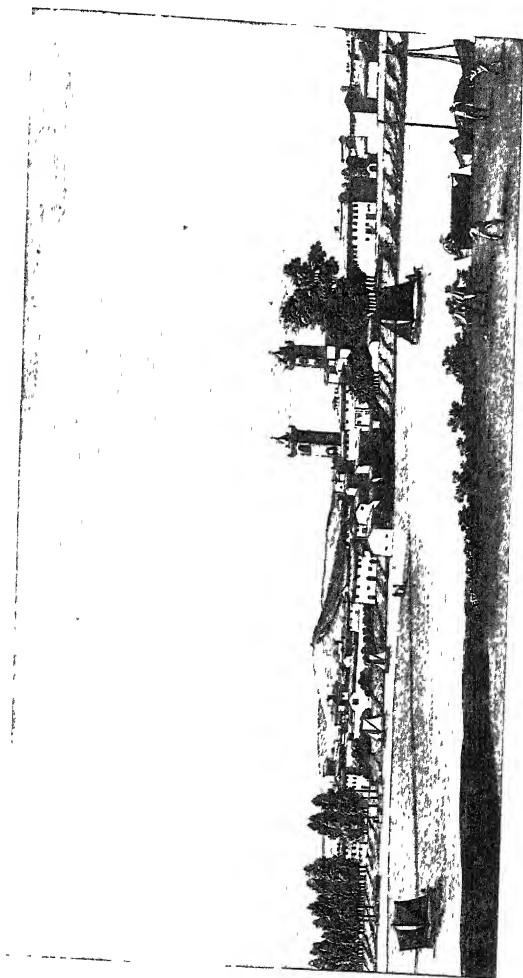
The origins of Empoli are certainly very ancient. A village without doubt existed here in Roman times, as the fragments of marble found in the course of excavations, and from time to time built into the façade of the Pieve, one of the most ancient and famous of Tuscany, testify. It was, about the eleventh century, a small *borgata* that not much later was furnished with walls, and grew up with a market place in front of the church. The place increased rapidly because of its central position, and in 1182, a year of scarcity, the Commune of Florence forced it to come within its dominion, and the men of Empoli swore in the

Palazzo Signoria of Florence to follow the will of the Republic in all wars except those against their ancient *padroni*, the Conti Guidi, and to pay an annual tribute on the day of S. John Baptist in the form of a great candle of wax. In 1184, however, the Emperor Frederick Barbarossa came to Florence in July and, receiving complaint from the nobles of the *contado* that the Commune of Florence had taken by force and occupied many of their castles and strongholds against the honour of the Empire, as those of the Cadolinghi at Monte Cascioli and Monte Orlando<sup>1</sup> and this town of Empoli of the Guidi, the Emperor took from the Commune all the territory and the lordship thereof up to the walls and sent his own vicars throughout the villages to administer law and execute justice. This did not last long: by 1188 Florence had got back all her possessions, and in 1255 she quite bought out the Guidi from Empoli.

It was at this time that Empoli played her greatest part in history. After the defeat and rout of the Guelfs, and especially of Florence, at Montaperto in 1260, when only Lucca still remained free, the Ghibellines wished to destroy once and for all the city of the Lily, and for this cause a council was summoned to be held at Empoli in which Guido Novello of the Conti Guidi was of great authority. This man was not only a deadly enemy of the Guelfs in general, but especially of Florence. He proposed, and all were agreed, that

<sup>1</sup> See *supra*, p. 189.

*Empoli*







for the sake of the Ghibelline cause Florence must be destroyed and "reduced to open villages so that there might remain to her no renown or fame or power." Then arose Farinata degli Uberti who, though a Ghibelline, remembered that he had been born in Florence. He opposed the design, saying that whilst he lived he would defend the city even with his sword. And when they all heard him, fearing that the Ghibelline party should be broken, "they abandoned the design and took new counsel so that by one good man and citizen our city of Florence was saved from destruction and ruin." For this also the greatest of Florentine exiles, finding Farinata in his fiery tomb, wishes him rest:

Deh se riposi mai vostra semenza  
Prega, io lui.

That council was held at Empoli because of its central position and was but the first of many, for instance, those of 1297 and 1304 when the Guelf League of Tuscany was renewed, and that of 1312 when the ambassadors of Florence, Lucca, Siena, and Bologna met there in the Pieve to conclude their alliance against the Emperor Henry VII and to decide upon action against him.

Empoli had been walled ever since the eleventh century, and in 1336 a new and large circle of fortifications was built. The old wall was never very strong and was by then utterly decayed and appears to have been more or less destroyed in the

flood of 1333. A third circle of walls was built in 1479. Doubtless each of these three circles was larger than its predecessor, the first having been certainly of very small extent, but the last, strong as it was, proved insufficient to keep out the rabble army of Vitelli and Sarmiento in 1530 when the town was taken and sacked by Cosimo I, as we see in Vasari's fresco in the Palazzo Vecchio of Florence.

Nothing could be farther from the thoughts of Empoli to-day than political intrigues and counsels and war. It is a busy little town still at the cross roads, though the southern way has become almost a by-way and the town itself is only known to the traveller at all because he must change there on his way from Florence or Pisa to Siena.

The utter neglect of Empoli is really astonishing when one finds what treasures she still possesses. These have now been largely gathered in the Collegiata di S. Andrea in the beautiful Piazza Farinata degli Uberti. The church itself, the ancient Pieve, is of considerable interest, and its lovely façade not on any account to be passed by without notice. I should like to say more about this façade: it is as important as it is lovely, a work of the Tuscan proto-renaissance dated 1093. Then in the Baptistery, with its exquisite font, you come upon a Pietà by Masolino da Panicale, where the Madonna and S. John lay our Lord in His tomb, while behind rises the Cross on which hangs a scourge of cords. In the second

chapel on the epistle side over the altar is a Madonna and Child by some Tuscan master, and a very curious fresco of men taming bulls.

The *Collegiata* has been turned into a gallery and there hang to-day a few lovely things gathered from the churches of the city. Among these are the delightful angels of Botticini which, in all the gay raiment of the fifteenth century and crowned with roses, bow before a statue of S. Sebastian, a noble work by Rossellino. By Botticini, too, are a delicious Annunciation and a panel in which seven angels play and dance to their own music. To the same master also are attributed two panels of S. Andrew and S. John Baptist in a great altar of the late fifteenth century which contains also three predella pieces from the same hand, in which we see in the midst the Last Supper, on the left a Crucifixion, and on the right Salome with the head of S. John Baptist. Close by is a very noble triptych of Lorenzo Monaco, of the Madonna and Child with SS. Paul, John Baptist, Peter, and Anthony Abbot, a splendid fifteenth-century panel in a beautiful frame of S. Biagio, and a charming Madonna and Child with donor by Bicci di Lorenzo. Nor is this all. The little gallery boasts also two very interesting predellas of the Compagnia della SS. Croce, depicting a miracle of the Holy Crucifix in the plague of 1399, by Francesco and Raffaello Botticini; a large altarpiece of the Virgin and Child with saints by Pier Francesco Fiorentino; a Madonna and Child with

saints and angels showing the strong influence of Masaccio, possibly by Pesellino; a Madonna and Child with four saints and angels by Rossello di Jacopo Franchi; a good monochrome fresco of the Madonna and Child close to Fra Bartolommeo; and a host of trecento and early quattrocento pictures. A very fine marble fragment of the Madonna and Child by a close follower of Niccolò and Giovanni Pisano should not be missed. Here, too, are some very fine reliefs of the della Robbia, one of the Blessed Virgin between two saints celebrating her Immaculate Conception, while above the angels dance in heaven and beneath our Lord rises from the tomb, S. Jerome prays in the desert, S. Francis shows his Stigmata, and so forth. Another is a large altar-piece of S. Anselm enthroned between four saints under a frieze of angels' heads, while below S. Jerome prays again, our Lord rises from the tomb, and S. John Baptist stands in his camel's hair praying in the wilderness. A fine full-length statue of the Madonna standing with our Lord in her arms in a beautiful niche is also attributed to the Robbia, while from the hand of Mino da Fiesole there is a fine relief of the Madonna and her little Son.

Nor have the churches of Empoli been quite stripped of their beauty to furnish this gallery. In S. Stefano there still remains a Madonna and Child with two angels, a work by Masolino, and a glorious Annunciation, by Bernardo Rossellino; while in S. Maria a Ripa, an old Franciscan

convent outside the great Porta Pisana, which, as we see, was the work of Cosimo I, are some more works of the Robbia, a beautiful statue of S. Lucy by Giovanni della Robbia and an altar-piece of the Madonna and Child between S. Francis and another saint with predella.

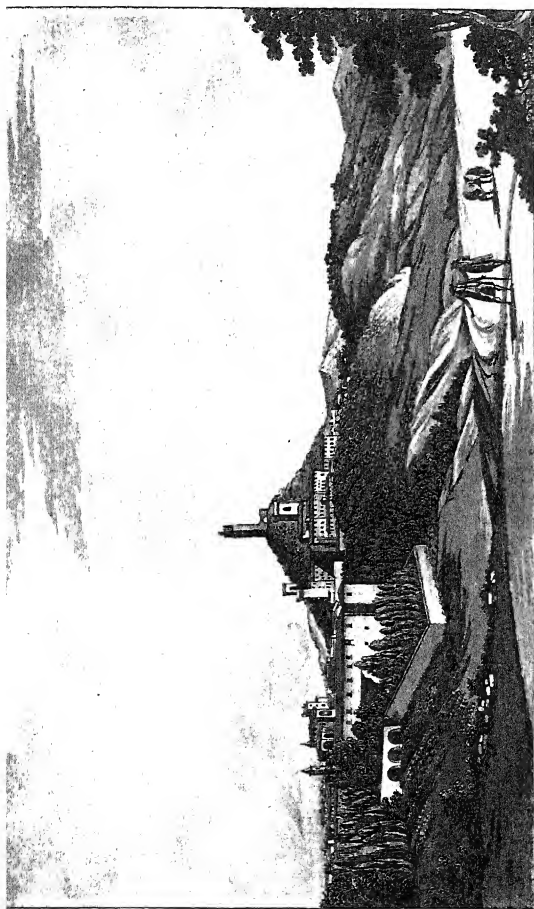
S. Maria a Ripa lies on the road to the ford of the Arno by which the Via Francigena crossed the river. This is not the Via Pisana. That passes also out of Porta Pisana but turns south-west to cross the Via Francigena, some three miles from Empoli, and crosses the Elsa half a mile farther on by the Ponte a Elsa. Thence it turns north for a few hundred yards and then runs due west along the foot of the southern hills.

Upon these hills over Val d'Arno and Val d'Elsa, some six miles from Empoli, stands all that remains of the fortress of S. Miniato al Tedesco, a ruined gaunt tower above the houses of the delightful town that has grown up through the centuries within its shadow. Its origin was, as we have seen, this fortress founded according to some by Desiderio, last king of the Lombards, and according to others, by Otto I. However that may be, in the first notice we have of it in Villani under the year 1113, it appears in its true colours as a fortress of the Empire. "In the year of Christ 1113 [says Villani] the Florentines marched against Montecasciolo, which was making war on the city having been stirred to rebellion by M. Ruberto Tedesco, vicar of the Emperor Henry in Tuscany who was

stationed with his troops in Samminiato del Tedesco, so called because the Vicars of the Emperors with their troops of Germans were stationed in the said fortress to harry the cities and castles of Tuscany that would not obey the Emperors." There, indeed, we find emperor after emperor. Frederick Barbarossa knew S. Miniato well, as did Frederick II, who dwelt there and gathered about him many poets and there made songs and there, too, blinded and imprisoned Messer Piero delle Vigne, his friend and counseller,

... Che tenni ambo le chiavi  
Del cuor di Federigo . . .

accusing him of treason. This was in 1236. "And thereon," says Villani, "the said M. Piero soon suffered himself to die by grief in prison, and there were those who said that he himself took away his own life." The truth was Piero knew too much and the Emperor feared his great estate so that he readily believed all that envy could bring against him. Those were the great days of S. Miniato; with the death of Frederick and Henry VII the place must have lost most of its original importance. Long before then indeed, even in S. Miniato, the *popoli* who had first sought the protection of the castle had rebelled against its domination, and had indeed deserted the place, going to S. Genesio in the valley. They do not seem to have been well received, and they were forced to return to face and outface at last with



*San Miniato al Tedesco*





their industry and persistence the cruelty and tyranny of the castle in whose shadow they lived, till, in 1369, S. Miniato came into the dominion of the Republic of Florence.

Nothing in all Tuscany is lovelier than S. Miniato to-day. The town stands finely above the terraced vines and olives upon the watershed of a long and winding hill, its narrow cloistered streets and great cool churches seem almost untouched since the Middle Age and the Renaissance. There you may wander up to the Castello where is Barbarossa's tower, for the sake of the view and see Arno winding through the vast plain below with the islanded hills of Vinci under Monte Albano, Fucecchio in plain, distant Montecatini and Pistoja under the towering waves of the Apennine, Monte Cimone leaping sky high and the range surging away to Monte Morello above Florence. To the west rise up the jagged peaks of the Apuan Alps, Monte Verucca over all, and beneath them Lucca and Pisa with a shimmer of distant sea. To the south-west Volterra is up-reared among the mists and southward you may catch the towers of San Gimignano over the sleeping hills of the Chianti. Then you may pass happily to the Duomo which, in its dedication of S. Maria and S. Ginesio, still commemorates the exodus of the S. Miniatesi; and if the church is not very interesting there still remain there certain fragments of the old pulpit and a relief of the Annunciation, of the thirteenth century,

together with a panel by some contemporary of Neri di Bicci. The most interesting church in the place, however, is that called S. Domenico, but really dedicated in honour of S. Jacopo e S. Lucia. It was founded in 1330, and its chapels, built by the foremost families of the city, remain in great part in their original condition. There you may see, surrounded by frescoes, three pictures of that time, one of which at least, on account of its sweetness, is worth all the heat of the way thither. There Madonna sits a little sadly and gravely enthroned, her Baby on her knee, and beside her stand four saints on guard, S. Sebastian and S. John Baptist, S. James and S. Roch, while below the donors kneel, a man and woman with their little daughter, and between them is written: AVE REGINA COELORVM. This by Mariotto di Nardo. Below, in the predella, we see the Birth of S. John Baptist, his departure into the wilderness, the Baptism of our Lord, and the Dance of Salome by the Maëstro di San Miniato. Not far away, surrounded by frescoed angels, is another exquisite work of the Madonna and Child enthroned between S. John Baptist and S. John Evangelist, and yet another of S. Michael and S. Lucy with a curious fresco above of shipwreck, perhaps a miracle from the life of S. Lucy, perhaps the storm which our Lord stilled upon the sea of Galilee, both these works are by Rossello di Jacopo Franchi, Mr. Perkins tells me. Nor is this all. In the chapel in which stands the first of these pictures is a noble

tomb attributed to Donatello, while in another chapel is an Annunciation given to Giovanni della Robbia. In the chapel to the right of the high altar is a fresco of S. Stephen by some contemporary of Masolino, and an altar-piece of the Madonna and Child, SS. Cosma and Damian with predella by Domenico di Michelino. In the chapel, left of the high altar, are several interesting panels: a S. Anthony Abbot against a wonderful ground of red and gold birds; a S. Jerome at his desk with lion, reminiscent of Gerini; a small panel of S. Catherine of Alexandria of the school of Agnolo Gaddi; a S. John Baptist and a predella piece, the death of S. Catherine, belonging to the triptych by Rossello di Jacopo Franchi (on the left of the entrance door); and an altar-piece of a Dominican saint as yet unidentified.

Upon the other side of the city stands the church of S. Francesco, founded in 1343 upon the site of an ancient oratory of S. Francis. It is a spacious building full of light, and possesses the magnificent remains of a fourteenth-century fresco in the campanile and a large fragment of a S. Christopher by Masolino.

More interesting, perhaps, is the Palazzo Comunale, founded in the fourteenth century. Within, one chamber, the chief, the Salone del Consiglio, remains with all its frescoed splendour complete, a noble example of a council chamber of that time. Beneath is a little chapel adorned with frescoes of the first part of the fifteenth century

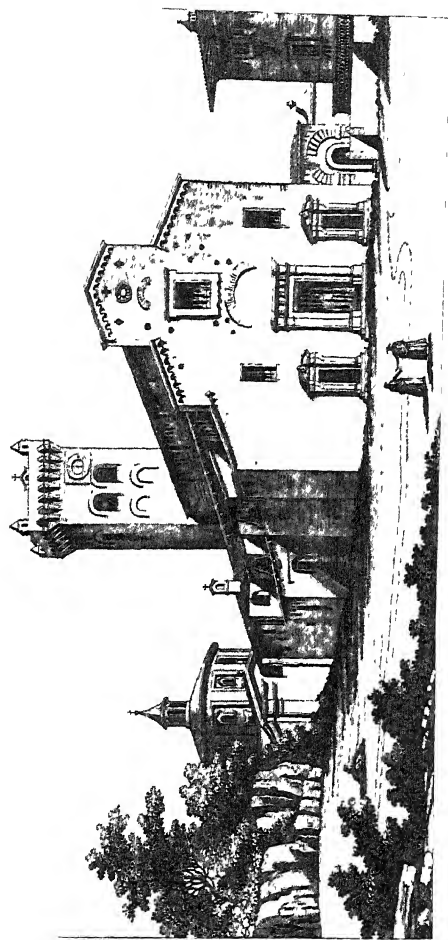
and furnished with a beautiful altar of wood carved in the sixteenth century. All is closed by a fine iron screen forged by Lello of Siena.

But the delight of S. Miniato al Tedesco to-day lies rather in itself than in its treasures. No other city in Val d'Arno has quite its old-world charm, its fierceness quite gone out and turned to flowers as it were, the flowers of its gardens and terraces which surround it with so much pleasure and sweetness that it is hard to leave them for the dust of the way.

Yet more than one place well worth a visit lies on this side Arno at the foot of the hills or upon their lower slopes between S. Miniato and the entrance into Val d'Arno Pisano at Pontedera.

Immediately without the city on the west is the church of S. Chiara, which possesses a fine picture by Ludovico Carli da Cigoli, and a little farther the church of S. Maria del Fortino, still a building of the fourteenth century, where, over the altar, stands on a tabernacle a half-destroyed work of the school of Ghirlandajo, in which we see the Madonna and Child, and without the tabernacle, above, God the Father with angels, and below, SS. Sebastian, Cosma and Damiano, Bartholomew, and Catherine; a fine work of the time.

Then above the Via Pisana to the south of the hill stands the picturesque Castello di Montebicchieri, still surrounded by walls and defended by towers over the olive gardens and the vineyards where perhaps Dino Campagni was born;



*The Cathedral, San Miniato al Tedesco*



at least the place was the seat of his family. Close by at Corazzano is the fine eleventh-century church, the Pieve di S. Giovanni Battista, within which is a most precious fresco, perhaps from the hand of Alessio Baldovinetti.

Not far away towards the valley lies Cigoli where, on the site of the old *rocca*, stands to-day a noble villa, and where, in the rebuilt church of S. John Baptist, inhabited in the fifteenth century by the Frati Umiliati, is a magnificent tabernacle of stone of that time, within which is a very ancient representation of the Madonna. Nothing in Val d'Arno is lovelier of its kind than this wonderful tabernacle erected by the Frati.

Beyond Cigoli rises towered Montopoli, its clock tower representing all that remains of its famous *rocca* which the Florentines made so strong here on the confines of the *contado* of Pisa. It faced the Pisan fortress of Castel del Bosco, of which nothing now remains, perhaps a sufficient commentary upon the result of that terrible and tragic struggle between the two great cities.

Returning towards Empoli one crosses the Arno by the modern bridge above the old ford of the Via Francigena. It may well be that in the early Middle Age there was a wooden bridge here, really a temporary structure, but we have no record of any bridge of stone. For the most part the ford was used.

On the hills, the lower slopes of Monte Albano, to the north of the river, more than one little town



of interest is set, and of these the more famous and the more interesting are Vinci and Cerreto-Guidi.

Vinci, a picturesque and towered castello which lies farther in the hills than Cerreto-Guido, owes most of its attraction to the fact that it is the reputed birthplace of Leonardo. Ser Piero da Vinci, the Florentine notary, who is said to have been the father of Leonardo, had here, both in the castello and in the surrounding countryside, certain houses and property, but though this would lead us to believe that Vinci was Leonardo's earliest home it is impossible to be sure that he was born here. The place, of course, cannot boast of any example of his rare work, and is indeed very poor in works of art. The parish church of S. Croce is not itself a remarkable building, and it possesses nothing of interest, but the charming Oratorio della SS. Annunziata still boasts of a picture of the Annunciation, now generally attributed to Fra Paolina da Piŕtoja, but probably by a pupil.

After Vinci comes the village of Lamporecchio, lorded over by the handsome Renaissance Villa Rospigliosi, one of the great *case signorili* of this part of the Arno and visible from miles around.

Much more interesting is Cerreto-Guidi, to which one returns from Vinci. This is a little town circling a hill-top right over Val d'Arno, and was one of the most ancient strongholds of the Conti Guidi, and came to the Republic of Florence in 1273 from the hands of Guido Salvatico in

payment of a debt to the Republic. The site of the old Guidi fortress was presently occupied by a splendid villa built by the Medici, and there, on the night of 16th July 1576, Paolo Giordano Orsini, Conte di Bracciano, murdered his wife, the beautiful, unhappy, and unfaithful Isabella, the daughter of Cosimo I. The cord with which she was strangled still hangs in her bedroom and is shown by the present owners.

Close by this villa, in whose rooms the lovely Isabella seems even yet to wander to and fro, stands the church of S. Leonardo, full of delightful works of art which it owes to the Medici house. The finest of all these is undoubtedly the glorious font of Giovanni della Robbia. All in terra-cotta and hexagonal in shape this font is everywhere covered with reliefs of *angiolini* and garlands and fruit and arabesques, six major reliefs, framed with noble ornaments and decorations, occupying the six sides with episodes from the life of S. John Baptist, his birth, naming, departure for the wilderness, baptism of our Lord, and death. Nor is the church empty of pictures. There still remains a panel of the Blessed Virgin with her little Son between S. Leonard and S. Paul, perhaps by Filippino Lippi, and an altar-piece of the Madonna and Child between S. Jerome and S. Michael that Franciabigio perhaps painted. A Crucifixion, with S. Sebastian and S. Rocco on guard, is almost certainly from the hand of Poccetti, while a noble Crucifix is attributed to Gianbologna.

From Cerreto-Guidi it is easy either to seek the river again and so proceed beside it westward by the Via Francigena to Fucecchio, or to reach that redoubtable castello directly through Poggio Tempesti. Fucecchio has this advantage over Cerreto-Guidi, that it bestrides the Via Francigena and is thus, though on the northern side of Arno, upon the road to Rome. This easily enabled it to outshine Cerreto-Guidi, but the fact that it stood to the north of the Arno as certainly made it of less importance than S. Miniato al Tedesco to the south. Indeed, it can never have been anything but secondary to that capital fortress, for it stood in the midst of a vast marsh across which the Via Francigena had been built from Colline delle Cerbaje to the river ford. The oldest part of the town is that along the hill-top, and it was there the Cadolinghi had their home and chief stronghold. These Counts of Borgonuovo, as Fucecchio or this part of it was then called, who dominated so much of the Val d'Arno Inferiore, also held the eastern entrance of the Gonfolina, as we have seen, and probably founded the Badia a Settimo. Here, too, they founded a monastery and dedicated it to our Saviour on the hill called Sala Marzana close by.

Fucecchio, now a place that should only be famous for its luscious peaches, played a considerable part in the history of Tuscany in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Consistently Guelph, the place offered a refuge to the defeated

*Fuencaballo*





after Montaperto and Montecatini, and finally came within the dominion of Florence in 1330. This was after the terrible attack and siege the place suffered at the hands of Castruccio Castracane in 1323. He was unsuccessful, but the fighting was so hot about Porta S. Andrea that to this day they call that gate Porta di Castruccio. Unfortunately, though the town is still very picturesque, less than one might expect remains of those famous years. The Badia di S. Salvatore has really conserved very little of its old structure. It has passed through so many hands, first those of the Benedictines, then of the Vallombrosans, and later into those of the nuns, that it has, from time to time, suffered many changes and its ancient treasures of art have been lost to it. To-day we may only see there works by Vasari and his contemporaries.

A worse fate still has befallen the ancient pieve of S. John the Baptist. This was wholly rebuilt in the eighteenth century, and though it has managed to preserve its wealth of ancient pictures, among them works ascribed to Lorenzo di Credi, Filippino Lippi, Cosimo Rosselli, and others, they are but doubtfully what they seem and the church itself is wholly without interest. The true history and the secret of Fucecchio, if one might unravel it, would be found to proceed from the fact that it stood upon the confines not only of the Pisans and the Florentines, but also of the Lucchesi. It was the most eastern of such fortresses, and it stood upon the Via Francigena

in a difficult country of marsh. It commanded the Ponte a Cappiano upon that great way over the main canal which, from the Middle Age, has drained this marsh, a crossing of perhaps only less importance than that of the Arno itself. It lies to the north-west of Fucecchio, under the hills of Cerbaje, and so important was that bridge with its defences that in 1508 Antonio and Francesco da Sangallo were employed upon them and much of their work remains for admiration to this day.

A road runs south-west beside the winding Arno out of Fucecchio on to Pontedera, and upon it are established two places that should on no account be missed by anyone who has adventured so far; I mean S. Croce dell' Arno and Castelfranco di sotto.

S. Croce was a dependence of the Counts Cadolinghi of Fucecchio, but coming into the hands of the Pisani in the thirteenth century it was fortified and walled in 1287. It is interesting on this account and for the charming statuette of S. John Baptist still preserved in the rebuilt church of S. Lorenzo.

Castelfranco, with its clock-tower forming an archway over the main street, lies beyond it, more formidable by far. It, too, was a possession of the Cadolinghi, but after it had won its independence it fell into the power of Lucca, from which city it was taken in 1260, as was its neighbour, S. Maria a Monte, by Guido Novello and the Ghibelline League. In 1333 it suffered greatly from the

disastrous flood of that year, and six years later came within the dominion of Florence. It remains a walled town with four gates, though all are ruined. Unfortunately, its Pieve of S. Pietro has been entirely rebuilt and preserves nothing of interest save a wonderful old statue of S. Peter, certainly a Pisan or Lucchese work of the fourteenth century.

Better worth seeing is S. Maria a Monte, the old castello in the hills to the south-west of Castelfranco and not far from the highway. With a similar history to that of Castelfranco it has been able, perhaps owing to its situation, to preserve far more of its antiquity. But few remains of its famous *rocca* may still be seen it is true, but one of its towers now serves as the campanile of its collegiate church of S. Giovanni Evangelista. This is still in part ancient and, best of all, preserves altogether its wonderful pulpit and font.

The pulpit is of marble set against the wall and upheld by two capitalled columns that rest upon the backs of lions. Upon these columns is set a pediment adorned with curious figures in *intarsia* of black and white marble. This pediment supports a delightful blind arcade of pointed arches carved and supported by round pilasters. The whole is a Lucchese work of the thirteenth century. The font is later. Octagonal in shape, it was made in 1463 by Domenico Rosselli da Rovezzano, who carved it with eight reliefs of the Baptism of Christ and of the Cardinal and Theo-



logical Virtues, surrounding it above and below with a grandiloquent signature.

When I had seen these two wonders it was evening, so that I set out in haste along the road through the *borgo* of the Montecàlvoli, and presently crossing the river by the modern bridge where my fathers would have sought the ford, I came into the noise and industry and unrest of Pontedera.

### XIII

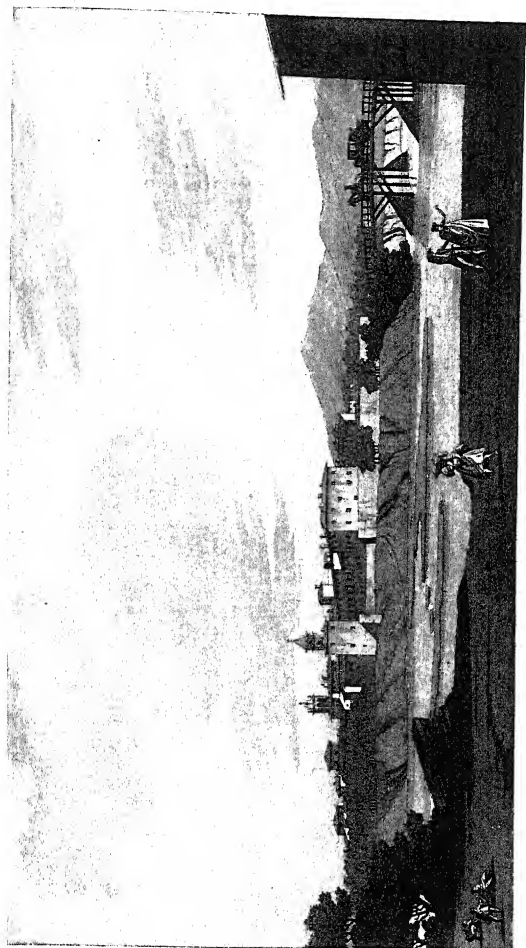
#### VAL D'ARNO PISANO

THE VAL D'ARNO PISANO, WHICH ONE ENTERS at Pontedera, is a vast and melancholy plain wholly subject to the sun, the sky, and the clouds in a way that no other part of Italy, I think, south of the Apennines, can be said to be. Indeed, it resembles in its aspect the Lombard plain, the valley of the Po, and as that has been the cockpit of Italy, so this, in its smaller way, has been the cockpit of Tuscany, the battlefield of the two major cities of Val d'Arno, Florence and Pisa. It is indeed its fortresses, the advance posts of Florence, the farthest and last defences of Pisa, that lend it its interest, and if we may say that the Val d'Arno Inferiore is wholly dominated by the great road the Via Francigena and its crossing of the river, we may say of Val d'Arno Pisano that it is everywhere marked as a battlefield, as the arena and scene of the tragic struggle between the maritime Republic of Pisa, famous for its aristocratic and Ghibelline society, and the democratic and Guelf Republic of Florence with its extraordinary intellectual power, its creative genius, and persistence.

In its larger aspect the Val d'Arno Pisano may be said to be a cul-de-sac, having four entrances

but no free exit. It is entered upon the east from the Val d'Arno Inferiore at Pontedera; upon the south by the Val d'Era from Volterra, and by the Via Cassia from the Maremma; upon the north by the coast road which Lucca could always cut. Its true exit was the sea, but that sea led nowhere, and there the ships of Pisa immediately met every sort of rival, the Saracens, the Genoese, the Amalfitani. In the midst of this valley so strangely closed lay Pisa, striding the river in the open plain in the midst of a marsh that was everywhere impassable save by the great roads. Such was the plain in which Florence met the last foe which denied her the domination of the valley from its source to the sea.

The Val d'Arno Pisano is very intricately formed. The Arno winds across it in a series of large loops more and more sluggishly as it goes seaward. To the south a vast plain stretches away to the Monti di Volterra, which are only broken by one valley, that of the Era, which, at the entrance of the Val d'Arno Pisano, joins the greater stream, and at its source is completely dominated by the great fortress city of Volterra. The Roman road from the south clings to the coast, and though it passed through Pisa, belongs of right to the sea reach of the Arno. On the north the geography of the Val d'Arno Pisano is much more complicated. There the plain as far westward as Pisa is always narrow, and is entirely broken by the vast spurs of that island of hills,



*Pontedera*



the Monti Pisano, behind which, upon the Via Francigena, lurks Lucca holding not only that ancient way, but the great exit and entrance of the Val di Serchio and, rightly understood, the coast road too between the Carrara mountains and the sea. Had these formidable hills struck the Arno at Pontedera, where they would have been met by Monti di S. Miniato upon the east of Val d'Era, a pass, a gate, would have been formed which, if she could have given undivided attention to it, Pisa might have held against Florence. But as it is the Monti Pisano lie too far eastward, the Colline delle Cerbaje hold the place they might have occupied and they are not enough, the gate they help to make is not sufficient, to hold the way, the Via Pisana easily passes through it without having to face a single obstacle.

The only obstacle, indeed, that is to be found there, is not due to the mountains, but to the river, which, in the midst of the too wide pass, makes a double bend north and south. The northward bend means nothing, but that to the south receives the waters of the Era, and it is there Pontedera stands.

Pontedera is thus the key of the eastern gate of Val d'Arno Pisano, and a poor key. Indeed, until the beginning of the thirteenth century it was but a simple *borgo*, but then the Pisans, hard put to it to hold the way, built there a formidable castello on the banks of the Era and fortified it. In 1256

Florence wiped it out. Those middle years of the thirteenth century are full of the Florentine-Pisan wars. Villani, in 1254, tells us "how the Florentines marched against Pisa and the Pisans submitted to their terms," and in 1256 "how the Pisans broke that peace and how the Florentines routed them at the bridge over the Serchio." It was then that the Castello of Pontedera was destroyed. In 1290 the Pisans retook Pontedera and rebuilt the castello, which they lost again three years later. And so the struggle went on till, in the middle of the fifteenth century when it was finally decided in favour of Florence, the whole of this country was found to be depopulated and was colonized by Florence from the Garfagnana. The place was then apparently still walled, though ruinous. These walls and fortifications were finally destroyed however in 1554 when Pontedera, having given asylum to Piero Strozzi against the motley army of Charles V, was taken by the Marchese di Marignano and wholly dismantled.

Nothing indeed remains in Pontedera to-day to remind us of its history. The place is modern, an industrial town, very populous and full of business; its poor and rebellious people being among the most restless in Tuscany. Nothing in the town relieves its wretchedness, and it is only on a market day that it seems to awake to the sunshine to put on a little gaiety and to enjoy the chaffering of the peasants, the movement and noisy jollity of the market which thus once a week lend

it a certain humanity in which the bitterness of its poverty and socialism are forgotten for a little, and the fierce surliness of its people mitigated by the smiling country folk who come in from their happy farms in Val d'Era and Val d'Arno.

If Pontedera has hopelessly forgotten the past and has lost herself in a brutal contemplation of the present, Vico Pisano, on the contrary, still dreams of the Middle Age. The old fortress which stands under Monte Verruca to the east on a hill over the now drained marsh of Bientina was the second of the fortresses which, from Pontedera on the Via Pisana, guarded the north-eastern frontier of the Pisan *contado*; the third was Verruca upon the great crest above. Of the Castello of Pontedera, as we have seen, nothing remains; of Verruca, as we shall see, only a few stones are left, but the ruins of Vico Pisano, Florentine though they be and not Pisan, are worth any trouble to see, for indeed they are the work of Filippo Brunellesco and of a wonderful strength and beauty.

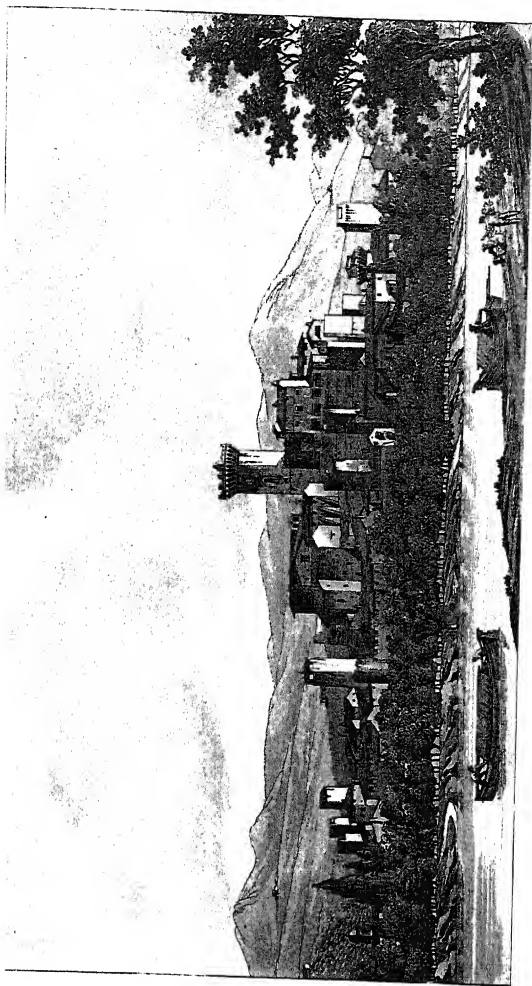
All the story of the long and tragic attempt of Pisa to maintain her independence against Genoa, Lucca, and Florence is full of heroism, but there is nothing in it more noble than the persistent fidelity of Vico Pisano, its wonderful enthusiasm for the cause of the mother city, its fierce hatred and contempt for her enemies which, time after time, she contrived to baffle only to fall at last into the hands of the strongest and most relentless, the hands of the Republic of Florence.



You come into Vico Pisano to-day up that steep hill to find only a charming village still surrounded by crumbling and beautiful walls and set with formidable and lovely houses crowned by the great keep. Something beautiful and tragic still haunts this ruined village now so quiet, the memory of an old loyalty that was never broken, of a long and heroic fight won over and over and over again only to be lost at last once and for ever.

That the place is of great antiquity its old Pieve shows you, for it still dates from the eleventh and twelfth centuries; that it was of some importance you gather from the Palazzetto Pretorio of the fourteenth century, with its wealth of *stemme* of the vicars of the place, but it is the castello, the fortifications, which bear witness to the fact that Vico was a first-class fortress; till, in 1405, it fell into the hands of Florence, indeed, it had never been taken, not even by Castruccio Castracane, though he more than once attempted it. Vico, or, as the older documents call it, Auserissola, was indeed naturally of considerable strength. On the east it was guarded by the river Seressa, from which it got its old name, and on the west by the Arno, which of old ran farther north than it does now, so that Calcinaja, now on the right bank, was then on the left.

The first notice we have of it dates from the tenth century, and already, in the twelfth, it was in dispute between Pisa and Lucca, though it seems always to have leant towards the former. The



*Vico Pisano*



first siege of which we have record, however, only dates from the end of the thirteenth century when, in 1289, as well as in 1309 and 1323, it was attacked by the Lucchesi who, led by Castruccio Castracane, himself got into the town in 1323 by the help of a traitor who admitted them. On the following morning the inhabitants attacked him and his men so furiously that they were forced to flee. Castruccio, who was not used to retreat, could not forget the incident, and four years later attacked the place again, but without success.

The fortifications of Vico were completed by the building of a great keep on the hill-top in 1330. All through the fourteenth century this was attacked by the Lucchesi and the Florentines, but it proved impregnable till, in 1405, Maso degli Albizzi and the Florentines besieged the place and after eight months' investment forced it to capitulate in July 1406. This was really the end of Vico as a Pisan stronghold. The Florentines indeed rebuilt the fortress by the hands of Filippo Brunellesco, and it is the ruins of his beautiful defences we see. Using the place as a base they thence began their long and final attack upon Pisa, and though in 1494 the place rebelled and turned them out, as indeed did the mother city, Paolo Vitelli, at the head of the Florentines, soon forced a surrender. A little later another heroic attempt was made by the brave little place to turn out Florence, whose forces were indeed kept at bay for a year, but in June 1503 the gates were opened

by the Swiss guards of the garrison and Florence marched in to remain there ever after undisturbed. Vico Pisano explains the history of the Val d'Arno Pisano better, perhaps, than any other place within it. There we see the victorious and beautiful towers of Florence founded upon the ruins of the Pisan fortifications.

It is only the ruins of Pisa we find on the top of the hills above Vico at Verruca. They look upon the city from the height nearly two thousand feet in the air, and afford an unrivalled view of the Val d'Arno Pisano as far as Bocca d'Arno and the sea, out of which rise the islands of Gorgona and Capraia. The fortress which, rebuilt from time to time, was as old as Vico, fell to the Florentines at last in 1431. They razed it and only in 1506 began to build it anew, using what they could of the old works. As it happens, it is only these old works, the ground floor of the rebuilding of the thirteenth century, which remain. What we see, crumbling walls and bastions, is Pisan, not Florentine work, and for this cause and for the sake of the view the place is perhaps worth a visit, for all the long climb necessary to reach it. The fortress contained the oldest existing inscription in the Tuscan tongue: A. DI. DODICI GUGNO. MCIII. Its authenticity has been doubted.

Such are the three Pisan *castelli* which here barred the road; they fell one after another, first Pontedera, then, in 1406, Vico Pisano, and finally, in 1431, Verruca.

The Monti Pisano, upon which Vico and Verruca stand, thrusts itself southward into Val d'Arno, the river running close beneath its southern escarpment. There, at the foot of the hills, upon the right bank of the stream more than one village stands, the more interesting of which are Uliveto and Caprona. The interest of Uliveto, where of late mineral baths have been established, lies wholly in its curious detached rocks which everywhere stand about the place like ruined towers; Caprona, on the other hand, has a history, and still boasts of a noble Pisan church of S. Giulia, the nave and campanile of which are of the twelfth century. It, too, was a Pisan fortress, and it held the narrow way between the river and the hills and in some sort supported Verruca, as that fortress did Vico Pisano, all these being in a line due east and west. It was the last to fall to Florence, who took it in 1453. Caprona, however, is chiefly famous for the short but terrible siege it sustained after Campaldino in 1289. The defeated Ghibelines of Pisa, hard pressed on their way homeward, had taken refuge there when the Florentines and Lucchesi besieged the place. It surrendered and vast crowds shouting "Hang them! Hang them!" assembled to see them marched out starving and very weary. Dante uses the scene, which he seems to have witnessed, as an illustration in the twenty-first canto of the *Inferno*:

Then to me my Guide; "O Thou  
Who on the bridge among the crags dost sit

Low crouching, safely now to me return.”  
 I rose and towards him moved with speed, the fiends  
 Meantime all forward drew: me terror seized,  
 Lest they should break the compact they had made.  
 Thus issuing from Caprona once I saw  
 The infantry, dreading lest his covenant  
 The foe should break, so close he hemmed them round.

Above Caprona, on the Monti Pisano, lies Calci, famous for its noble Pisan Romanesque Pieve and the Carthusian monastery close by, the Certosa di Pisa. The Pieve is worth some trouble to see on account of its fine façade of black and white marble and stone and its curious twelfth-century font wonderfully carved with figures in niches with beasts under their feet, and in the spandrels of the arcade, angels. The Certosa, however, is a much too famous building. As we see it it is a work of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and though its history is not without interest—it was founded in 1366 by an Armenian merchant of Pisa, and has harboured S. Catherine of Siena—it is an ornate work of a bad period with little but the great cloister, which has a certain grace and nobility, to redeem it from a rather vulgar mediocrity.

But we must return to the main road, the Via Pisana, which runs to the south of the river straight as an arrow's flight across the wide marshes, still lonely and melancholy, which lie between Pontedera and Pisa.

The first place upon this great highway, so soon to find its goal in Pisa itself, is Cascina, a little

walled town beautifully towered and fortified. The great road runs straight through the place, but it is on a by-way the piazza stands before the noble Pieve di S. Maria, with its old warlike campanile. The church was founded in 750, but the building we see dates from the twelfth century, the façade being a very fine work of about that time. One other work of art the little place boasts though it cares nothing for it. I mean the old church of the Knights of S. John of Jerusalem, now a *magazzino*. It is worth a visit, for it still contains some precious, if ruined, frescoes of the end of the trecento by Martino di Bartolommeo da Siena, dated 1396. Cascina, as its walls and even its Pieve bear witness, has suffered greatly in the Pisan-Lucchese-Florentine wars. Its whole story is one of depredation and siege and hard fighting, till, in 1499, it fell finally to Florence.

To pass gradually westward through these old *castelli*, noting the dates of their subjection to the City of the Flower, is to march in the footsteps of the progress of Florence, reading the milestones on the way.

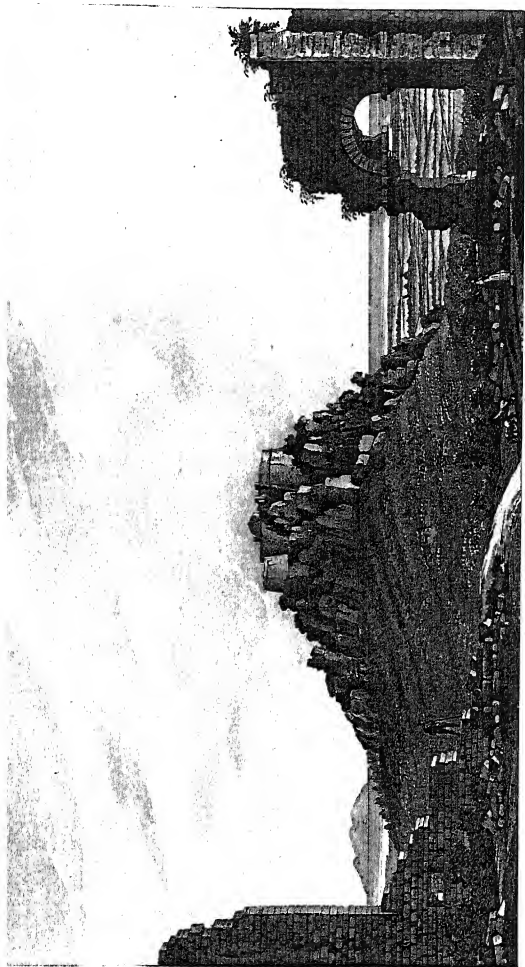
Cascina itself is, as it were, the image of this marsh country between the hills and the hills, between Pontedera and the sea, where the sun is absolute all day long and the shadows of the clouds drift over the low fields and the mist obscures everything at evening. Desolate and sombre on a day of rain, in the sunshine of June this tragic outpost of Pisa upon the way is as gay



as a flower by the wayside, and its beautiful old piazza, a little off the road, with a great palace on one side and the old tower and church with its noble façade on the other, a place to rest in and be thankful, while the children go in and out of the cavernous doors of the sanctuary eyeing one curiously and waiting, two or three together, to see what diverting tricks you may do. It is they who have trodden out with their tender feet the memory and the sign of the old hatreds, for them the future approaches in which there shall be none of these things.

Beyond Cascina, beside the road, is set a lonely but happy church rebuilt in the eighteenth century and of rosy brick; it is the Chiesa della Madonna dell' Acqua. Then a little farther you come to Settimo, which boasts of two noble churches, the Pieve di S. Cassiano, a basilica in the Pisan manner set among trees in a shady place by the river, and the church of S. Benedetto; both are worth some trouble to see.

The Pieve of S. Cassiano is a complete twelfth-century basilica with, alas, a modern campanile. The façade is very simple and noble, consisting of an arcade of five arches with three doors, over each of which Biduino of Pisa, in 1180, has carved reliefs. Those on either side represent various beasts and are marvellously decorative; but that over the principal door in the midst shows us, perhaps, the Raising of Lazarus and certainly the Entry into Jerusalem. The architrave on the



*Verruca*



gospel side bears the following inscription:  
 HOC OPUS QUOD CERNIS BIDUINUS DOCTE PEREGIT  
 UNDECIES CENTUM ET OCTOGINTA POST ANNI  
 TEMPORE QUO DEUS EST FLUXERANT DE VIRGINE  
 NATUS.

This noble façade, the reliefs of which are not in a very good state, is an untouched work of the twelfth century, as indeed is the whole exterior of the church. Within is a fine relief in the manner of Andrea della Robbia of the Baptism of our Lord.

S. Benedetto a Settimo, once called the Chiesa della Madonna del Pisano, has been completely rebuilt in modern times, but still retains its glorious *tralio* of marble carved with the loveliest reliefs of the beginning of the fourteenth century, the work of some Pisan master. There we see, under graceful Gothic canopies, seven scenes. On the gospel side we see S. John the Baptist; then the Visitation and the Annunciation. In the midst is the Assumption. On the epistle side is the Nativity of our Lord, then the Presentation in the Temple and S. Andrew. Nothing else upon the Via Pisana is finer than this precious work.

Not far from Settimo, on a little and perhaps artificial height in the midst of the plain between the river and the road, stands the famous abbey of S. Savino, founded in 780 by three brothers, nobles of Pisa, and placed under the rule of S. Benedict. The monastery was first built at Cerasiolo, near Calci, but owing to the liability of the place to flood, in the twelfth century the monks abandoned

it and built a church and a house upon the lofty foundation, as we see. In 1175 these Benedictines gave place to those who followed the rule of Camaldoli, who seem so to have enriched the place, but at the beginning of the fifteenth century it had become the prey of various cardinals. Eugenius IV, by a bull of 1439, restored it to the monks, who held it till 1569, when it was suppressed and its property assigned to the new and knightly Religion of S. Stephen by permission of Popes Pius IV and Pius V.

The abbey, which certainly from afar looks more like a fortress than a house of religion, figures much in the military annals of this much disputed territory. It served as quarters of retreat for the Pisans and the English troops of Sir John Hawkwood in 1364 when they were broken by the Florentines at Cascina, and again was occupied by Niccolò Piccinino in 1432.

Closed all about with walls, the little bare church is a notable example of the style of the thirteenth century. Beside the apse rises a great tower, everywhere pierced by small windows whence a man might shoot forth arrows, and was thus defended by those who possessed it, both Pisans and Florentines, on many occasions. Within, the place is bare enough, carved with a wooden lean-to roof and possessed of no works of art.

Other churches of some architectural interest strew the way and the countryside, more and more thickly populated, as one approaches Pisa: S.

Giorgio, S. Jacopo e Maria a Zambra, S. Lorenzo alle Corti are all worth a moment's inspection; but the finest church after leaving Settimo before entering the great Porta Fiorentina of Pisa stands on the other side of Arno and is best visited from the city. It is called S. Michele alle Scalzi. This sanctuary is especially notable for the beautiful Romanesque sculptures dating from the earliest years of the thirteenth century which adorn its central portal. The church stands with a fine campanile in a little piazza beside the road which climbs up beside it, and there over the central door we see a magnificent frieze of the half-figures of nine angels, and above, in a lunette, a splendid bust of our Lord in benediction, bearing in His left hand an open book in which we read: EGO SUM VIA ET VITA; PRINCIPIUM ET FINIS.

## XIV

### PISA

PISA HOLDS THE SEA GATE OF ARNO, IT WAS her glory and her misfortune; her glory because all her strength lay in that, her misfortune because it was not enough. The great Ghibelline city holds the sea gate at the lowest crossing of the river, she stands in the open mouth of the valley in the midst of a vast plain widening seaward and upon the great Roman road that ran northward along the Maremma coast to Luni and beyond, which passed through her, and in her forum met and crossed the Via Pisana, from Pisa and the sea to Florence. At first sight, then, her position seems to possess immense advantages; they were every one illusory.

In a previous chapter of this book I have compared the Val d'Arno, which runs westward to the Tyrrhene sea to the south of the Apennines, with the valley of the Po which runs eastward to the north of that barren range. If there be any reality in that comparison we may well ask again why Pisa never had the opportunity of the career of Venice. The true answer to that question may perhaps be summed up in the statement that Pisa stood beside the Tyrrhene, not the Adriatic sea; that she looked west instead of east; and, last and

certainly not least, that while Venice was an island and therefore impregnable, Pisa could always be assailed and attacked, and commanding as she did the sea gate of Val d'Arno, she invited the attack she was never strong enough to meet. Such in brief is the true answer; but undefined and unexamined, it is not enough. It is necessary in order fully to understand the problem to follow its solution in the history of the city.

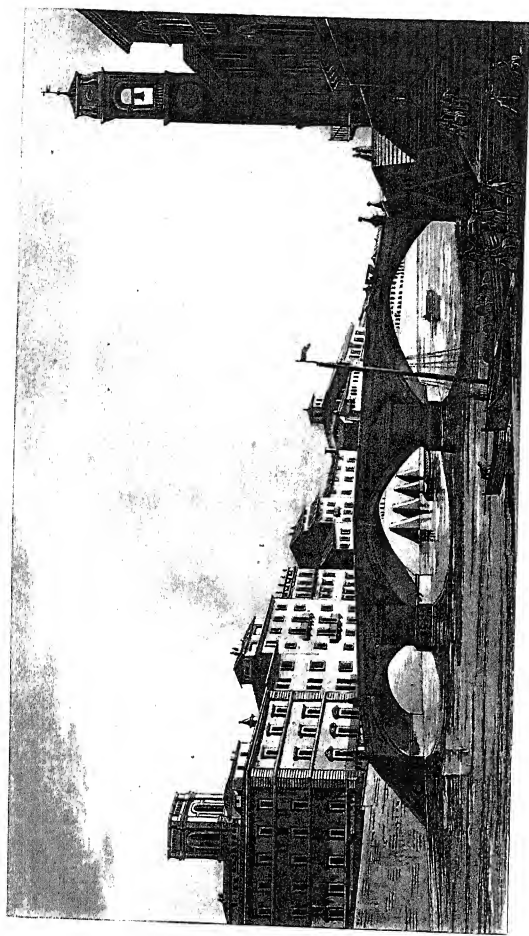
In the long centuries of the Dark Age, and in the first years of the mediaeval period, the Adriatic was of an infinitely greater importance than the Tyrrhene sea; it was the fault between east and west. There had appeared in the very first years of the Fall of the Empire a great city upon the shores of the Adriatic, of the first importance to Italy, which always rivalled and often outweighed even Rome herself in importance. This was Ravenna. Upon the ruin of Ravenna, Venice established herself. Venice was a city of the Dark Age, born of the anarchy of the barbarian invasions; with the decline and death of Ravenna it entered upon that part of her inheritance which lay as it were outside Italy.

Pisa was far older. In 225 B.C. she was an Etruscan city; in Strabo's day she was a Roman military station, and in the first years of our era she was already the greatest of Tuscan cities. Even to-day we may see the remains of the Roman *Thermae* near the Porta Lucca, and doubtless a great Roman town lies beneath the marsh. But



the Tyrrhene sea was not the Adriatic. In the great days of the Empire it led, of course, to Gaul, to Spain, and to the province of Africa, but with the loss of Gaul, of Spain, of Africa it led nowhere, it was a blind alley; beyond there lay only darkness. But beyond the Adriatic towered Byzantium and all the East, still firm on its foundations when the West was in the dust.

It was into the darkness Pisa ventured with her rivals, both of whom were better situated than she, though differently one from another; Amalfi was hundreds of miles nearer the scene of action; Genoa was lonely and virtually impregnable, and could give all her attention to the sea. Nevertheless it was Pisa, not Genoa, who was able to gain possession of Sardinia and Corsica from the Arab pirates, and all three ventured into Africa, Spain, and Palestine. But already, at the beginning of the eleventh century, Pisa had been reminded that there were enemies upon her flanks. In 1004 she had been compelled to fight Lucca, and in 1114, while her fleet and youth were far away upon the waters, the city itself had only been saved from the same foe by the interposition of Florence. Did she then realize where her weakness really lay? It does not seem so. In 1125 she quarrelled with Genoa and had to yield her certain rights at last in Corsica. It was nothing, and the memory of it certainly was quite wiped out by her one tremendous success, the defeat, in 1135, of the fleet of Amalfi and, in alliance with the Normans, the



*Ponte di Mezzo, Pisa*



destruction of the wonderful maritime Republic of the South from which Pisa brought back the Pandects.

That indeed was the day of her pride. To her proud and, alas, unseeing eyes she seemed impregnable. Her supremacy was unquestioned from Lerici to Piombino, but behind her hills Lucca was on watch; Florence, as yet her friend, towered in the middle valley of the Arno; Genoa, waiting the hour, flew her flag among the islands between the continents.

It was really at this moment that she perhaps decided her own fate, for such things are fundamentally spiritual after all, and not determined by geographical accidents; she became Ghibelline. The Papacy, Innocent III it was, interposed against her in Corsica and Sardinia. She threw herself into the cause that must always have been bankrupt, at least no city that made it her own escaped servitude. The future belonged to the idea that underlay the Guelf movement, and, supporting and informing it with its intellect, energy, and riches, stood Florence, Lucca, and Genoa, her enemies.

The quarrel with Florence, certain to come sooner or later, and this for every reason, first broke into war in 1232. Pisa was beaten. She faced all the misery of the reign and the rebellion of Frederick II, and as a Ghibelline stronghold suffered disaster by his death in 1250. In 1254 Florence and Lucca together broke and defeated

her. Nevertheless, in 1259, she drove the Genoese down the seas, and in 1260 seemed to have recovered everything when the Guelf cause in Tuscany was almost annihilated at Montaperto. But in 1265 Manfred fell at Benevento, in 1268 Corradino was defeated at Tagliacozzo and was executed in Naples by Charles of Anjou. All was changed; and in 1276 Ugolino della Gherardesca, with the Lucchesi, overcame Pisa, his native city. Florence was content, Lucca regained her fortresses. Pisa looked seaward, awaiting the attack from Genoa, for that would be a fight to the death. It opened in 1282. At midsummer, in 1284, the Pisan fleet was utterly defeated at the battle of Meloria. There fell that day 5,000 Pisans, with 11,000 captured, and twenty-eight galleys lost. Pisa was as a city of the dead for six months. If you would see Pisa, it was said, you must go to Genoa.

Pisa had lost the sea. Why? Because he who would hold the sea must be impregnable, except from the sea. Genoa, though she did not absolutely fulfil this condition, did so far more nearly than Pisa. Her vanquisher and successor, Venice, absolutely fulfilled it. To hold the sea you must be able to think only of the sea and to put all your thought and your energy and your riches upon the waters.

Having lost the sea Pisa remained merely a city holding a position in Val d'Arno. And what a position! She commanded nothing. The great northern road from Rome, the Via Francigena,

which crossed the broad Val d'Arno where it is broadest, was held where it crossed the river by S. Miniato already in the power of Florence, and again where it passed from the valley to the sea-shore by Lucca. The Via Pisana that ran up Val d'Arno was hers scarcely so far as she could see, it was the road of her enemies east and west, eastward it belonged to Florence, westward it led to the sea, now in the hands of Genoa; between, it was more barren and unserviceable than in any other part of its course. The coast road southward, which she held where it crossed Arno, led only into the bitterness of Maremma, or northward into the hands of the Genoese. After Meloria Pisa was merely a fortress in the midst of a marsh, a fortress that could not be reprovisioned save by leave of her enemies.

The rest of the history of Pisa may be said to be a preparation for the end, the lordship of Florence. Little by little the city of the Lily crept down the valley. You may mark every step of her advance, and indeed we have marked them, from the days when she gained first the eastern entrance and then the western exit of the Gonfolina in 1113 and 1203 to the last days when Pontedera fell in 1293, Vico Pisano in 1406, Verruca in 1431, and Caprona in 1453. It is true that advance was checked in the fourteenth century chiefly by Castruccio Castracane and Sir John Hawkwood, but it was never defeated and stopped. It went on through the years and the centuries with that persistence we associate with

Florence, and only came to an end when Pisa itself capitulated, and Florence held the Val d'Arno from its source to its mouth.

Pisa was sold to Florence by the Frenchman Boucicault, who held Genoa on behalf of Milan; and again by Giovanni Gambacorti, her own son, for 50,000 florins, the citizenship of Florence, and Borgo S. Sepolcro to rule. She deserved an end more honourable, and in some sort it was given her. She turned out the Florentines whom Boucicault had admitted into the citadel, and braced herself to face the Lily in war. It was, after how many years of civil discord, a united city which opposed the Florentine armies in 1406, and made an heroic defence. Everyone was starving when Gambacorti sold Pisa and flung open her gates to the Florentines, and it was into a city of the dying that they marched. The independence of Pisa was gone for ever; and this those Pisans who survived could not face. They stole away into the *contado* and to other cities, so that it is said there was scarcely left a Pisan in Pisa for the victor to govern.

The tragic story of Pisa has left but few marks upon the city, which is indeed one of the most charming in all Tuscany, with monuments of a peculiar beauty and nobility that are not surpassed by any other town in the peninsula. Pisa, in truth, has a wonderful charm. The river passes through the city like a golden bow, so that the Lung' Arno is there far more graceful and lovely than in

Florence, and if the Ponte di Mezzo has not the picturesque delight of the Ponte Vecchio it is probably far older in its foundations, for Pisa was, even as a Roman town, famous long before Florence was heard of. As we see it, however, the Ponte di Mezzo dates from 1064, when it was rebuilt at least with stone piers after the Sicilian expedition of 1063 and, according to Trinci, the Cathedral was founded. It seems to have occupied ten years in building and endured until 1382. "Pietro Gambacorti with the Elders and the Consiglio dei Cittadini," rebuilt it again and in stone "chiefly because there were many shops on the bridge that impeded the view of the beautiful Lung' Arno." This bridge was swept away by the great flood of 1635. A new bridge was built, but this also was carried away by flood in 1644. The present bridge dates from 1660, and is the work of Francesco Nave of Rome. It bears the following inscription upon one of the pillars at the northern end: EN MOLES OLIM LAPIDEA VIX AETATEM FERENS NUNC MEMOREA PULCHRIOR ET FIRMIOR STAT SIMULATO MARTE VIRTUTIS VERAE SPECIMEN SAEPE DATURA. Across it ran the great Roman road, from Rome to Luni, and upon it was played the famous Giuoco del Ponte which Mr. William Heywood describes so learnedly in his *Palio and Ponte*, and a model of which, with some of the shields and banners of the *Quartieri*, may be seen in the *museo*.

It is interesting to find that as early as the fourteenth century the beauty of the river and of the



Lung' Arno in Pisa was appreciated. It is, after the marvellous Cathedral group, the beauty of Pisa, *il bello di Pisa*, which everyone has loved and especially Leopardi, who overwhelms it with praise, "Questo Lung' Arno è uno spettacolo così bello, così ampio, così magnifico . . ."; and Byron and Shelley, too, chose to live within sight of it, though not on the same side of the river. Between their two palaces Arno turns into the city from the country and the plains, and then past the Loggia dei Bianchi, the Palazzo Gambacorti, the little marble Gothic church of Madonna della Spina, under the Torre del Castello, flowing out into the marshes again to the sea.

But in Pisa it is not the river or the Lung' Arno but the Cathedral group, the marvellous Duomo, Baptistery, Leaning Tower, and Campo Santo, all of marble, that, first of all and always, chiefly attracts us. And this is right. Nothing else in Pisa and little else in Italy can compare for beauty with those wonderful buildings which all together are unique in their lovely and lonely majesty.

The Cathedral buildings of Pisa do not form, as in Florence, Lucca, and Siena, the centre of the city; they are in a place apart on the edge of the city, only just within the walls which they overlook northward towards the hills. To reach that quiet meadow in which they stand from Ponte di Mezzo, it is best to follow the Lung' Arno Regio westward upon the right bank of the river past the Palazzo Agostini and Palazzo Lanfreducci, the latter with

that fanciful and enigmatic inscription, "Alla Giornata," turning just beyond the Grand Ducal palace into the Via S. Maria, a quiet, cloistral, and winding way which flows by the church of S. Niccolò, the church of the monks of the Badia of S. Michele di Verruca, whose campanile is said to be the work of Niccolò Pisano, to the Piazza del Duomo. There in dazzling sunlight stands the great group of buildings which is the eighth wonder of the world.

It was in 1064, after the victorious expedition to Sicily, that the Pisans, full of spoil, decided to build a great church in honour of S. Maria Assunta, for they had won their victory upon her feast day, the 15th of August. An old church decorated in honour of S. Reparata occupied the site which had once been filled by the baths of Hadrian. Infinite treasures of precious marble were brought from many a far country to adorn the new church, which was finished in some thirty years and consecrated by Pope Gelasius II in 1118. The names of two architects may still be read on the façade, Buscettus and Rinualdus, and it is to them we owe what, when all is said, is probably the loveliest mediaeval church in Italy, to serve as an example for many another round about, among them the Cathedrals of Lucca and Pistoja. Founded in a swamp just within the walls, the Cathedral of Pisa is a basilica with nave and double aisles, a transept flanked by aisles with a dome over the crossing, and a spacious choir and sanctuary. It is 104

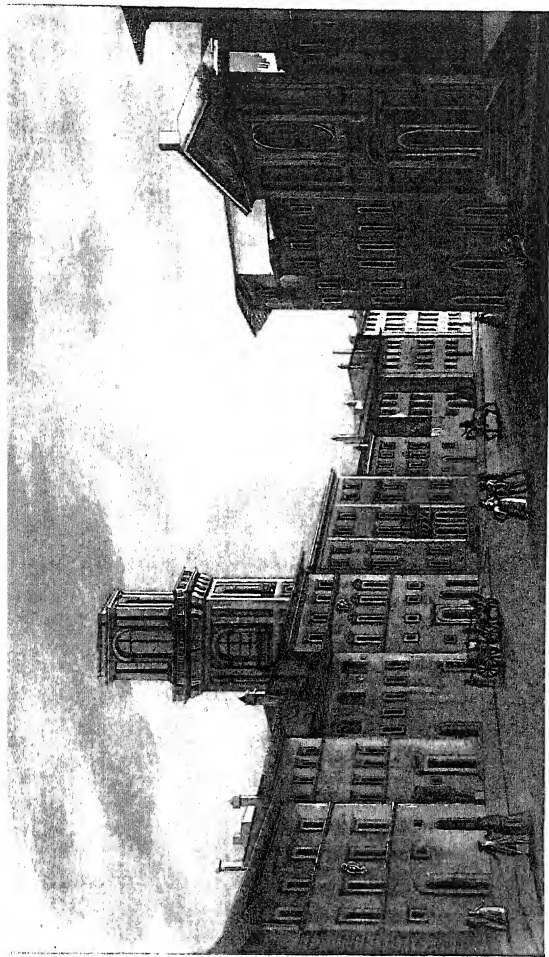
yards long by  $35\frac{1}{2}$  yards wide. Built all of white marble it is decorated with black and coloured bands of marble and stands on a beautiful marble platform which raises it like a casket over the meadow in which it lies. The façade is of the most splendid beauty, consisting of an arcade of seven round arches supported by columns over which rise four storeys of free columns supporting arcades gradually narrowing under the roof. There are three doors of bronze by Giovanni da Bologna. Upon the apex stands Madonna with her little Son in her arms and on the corners are figures of other saints. In the eastern side of the south transept is another doorway in which stand the grand bronze doors of Bonnanus dating from 1180. The whole church, upon great feasts, was engirdled just beneath the roof by a marvellous girdle of silver and jewels and silk worth some thirty thousand pounds of our money, which represented the girdle of the Blessed Virgin. A fragment of it remains to us and is now in the *museo*. Tronci tells us "this girdle which was of great value and very beautiful was spoken of through the whole world so that from many a city of Italy people came in haste to see it. . . ."

Within, the church is as noble as it is without. Sixty-eight antique columns, the spoil of war, uphold it, while over the nave is a seventeenth-century coffered ceiling of great richness. But apart from the beauty of the building there is little to see there; in the nave a few tombs, an altar-

piece by Andrea del Sarto, the bronze lamp which it is said suggested the pendulum to Galileo; in the choir the lovely Renaissance screens and the beautiful ambones and stalls, the restored mosaics of Cimabue in the apse, the wooden lectern of Matteo Civitali of Lucca behind the high altar, a crucifix by Giovanni da Bologna, and some poor works by Andrea del Sarto. Undoubtedly the loveliest work of art left in the church is the little ivory Madonna and Child by Giovanni Pisano, which is kept in the sacristy. The miracle picture *S. Maria sotto gli Orcagni* cannot be seen: its artistic interest would, however, seem to be small. But the greatest work of art the Cathedral possesses has but just been restored to it. I mean the great pulpit of Giovanni Pisano, which was re-erected here, after having been dismantled for many years, in 1926. This glorious work should be compared with the pulpit by Giovanni's father, Niccolò Pisano, in the Baptistery. Though restored it remains one of the finest things even in Pisa.

To the west of the Cathedral stands the circular Baptistery of marble, a casket as of ivory begun by Diotisalvi in 1153 but not completely finished till the fourteenth century. Of the four doors two, those on the east and the north, have above them thirteenth-century sculptures by Giovanni and other pupils of Niccolò Pisano. Within is the beautiful octagonal font in which everyone born in Pisa since 1157 has been christened, and the famous pulpit of Niccolò Pisano. The earliest work of

the great Pisan master, who was born in Apulia, is in the form of a hexagon resting upon nine columns of marble, the central one of which stands on a curious group of a man, a gryphon, and animals, while three others are set on the backs of lions. The six chief pillars upon which stand statues of the Virtues are connected by trefoil arches, in the spandrels of which are the four Evangelists and Six Prophets. Above the Virtues, where Fortitude is represented by Hercules, rise the clustered pillars which frame the five great bas-reliefs of the Birth of our Lord, the Adoration of the Magi, the Presentation in the Temple, the Crucifixion, and the Last Judgment, and it is here in these marvellous figures that we see the genius and the weakness of Niccolò Pisano. They are the direct result of the study of ancient models which, whether found in Apulia or in the Campo Santo hard by, have been studied with the most intense interest and astonishing clairvoyance. The reliefs as a whole are poorly composed, but there is not a figure in them that is not full of energy and remembrance; those horses' heads in the Adoration of the Magi, are they not taken from some Roman fragment? the Madonna in the Nativity, is she not a Roman matron? that crowd in the Last Judgment, are they not Romans everyone? Niccolò revived Roman art, and by doing so all unknowingly created or made possible the art of the Renaissance which, in his son's work, owed so much to the mediæval masters of France, and



*La Specula, Pisa*



in his later successors, more and more to mere observation. But in his hand the Roman chisel moved again and to new and greater purpose.

One looks at the pulpit and returns to it again and again while the custodian evokes the echo of the dome, and then out of that aerial music, a series of chords suspended in the air as though fallen from heaven, one passes into the cloistered silence of the Campo Santo, where the very earth in which the cypresses are dying comes from Jerusalem and the urns and sarcophagi of Rome hold Christian dust, and the noble work of the masters of the trecento is fading on the walls. Was it here the great Niccolò Pisano learned to carve amid these wonderful fragments of pagan antiquity?

But it is not to these one is most eagerly drawn in the beautiful cloister, but to the frescoes there on the walls, half bleached by the sea wind, the frescoes of those unknown masters, followers, surely, of the Lorenzetti, of the Triumph of Death. Mr. F. Mason Perkins, however, attributes these frescoes to Pisan masters influenced by Orcagna. Turn then to the work, the happy, irresponsible work, of Benozzo Gozzoli (1468-1484), in which he finds the triumph and the joy of life, a laughing and exquisite counterpart to the sombre beauty of these tremendous earlier frescoes. Again there are numerous other works of the fourteenth century here, among them the frescoes of the Story of S. Ranieri by Antonio Veneziano (1384-1387)



and Andrea da Firenze (1377); and fragments of frescoes of SS. Elizabeth, John Baptist, and John Evangelist by Spinello Aretino; frescoes, too, of the Thebais by some anonymous Pisan influenced by Orcagna; and a Crucifixion which Mr. Perkins attributes to some Pisan influenced by Francesco Traini. It is here in this lovely place sacred to death that the true Pisa, the spirit of the old heroic city, seems to linger even yet in the cool cloister amid the debris of the ancient and the mediaeval world and the first flowers of the Renaissance.

But lovely as the Campo Santo is, it is the Tower, the last wonder of the Piazza del Duomo, that is its unique treasure, the tower that leans like a lily in the wind and is as strange as the horn of a unicorn. Is it of marble or of ivory? It might seem hard to say after so many hundred years of sun and wind. It was begun in 1174, designed by Bonannus, as the bell tower of the Cathedral. It should be needless to add that the lean of the tower is due to some accident. This would seem to have befallen after the third gallery had been built, for the fourth, added in 1204 by another hand, began to rectify the balance and the rest continues to throw its weight from the lower to the higher side. The whole city, it should be remembered, was built on a marsh, and doubtless the foundations here proved insufficient. We are here dealing with a Latin, not a Teutonic, building, and those who suggest that the lean of the tower was designed from the beginning, have failed to

understand the difference between the Latin and the Barbarian mind. To the one a freak is abominable and indeed unthinkable, to the latter it is natural enough. It should be noted, too, that it was a northerner, William of Innspruck, who finished the tower in 1260, and it may well be he found pleasure in its strangeness, as we do, and did not consider it necessary to refound it and build again from the beginning. Let us, if you will, be thankful for this, but let us be sure also that the tower of Pisa would be even more beautiful than it is if it did not lean.

Beside this wonderful and unique group of buildings everything else in Pisa sinks into insignificance. It is true that more than one church has very considerable interest, those of S. Niccolò and S. Francesco being traditionally indeed from Niccolò Pisano's hand.

The old convent of S. Francesco has become the Museo Civico. It should be familiar to every student of Italian art. Unfortunately, there exists no catalogue, and half the pictures have never been photographed. A large number of them are signed works and of great importance for study. This much neglected museum, neglected, I mean, by the traveller, is one of the most valuable and interesting in Tuscany. It is small, but it possesses many very early works which it is impossible to match elsewhere.

From the chapter-house one passes up to the first floor of the convent, and so through a vast

room hung with the banners of the *Giuoco del Ponte* to the Picture Gallery, where first one finds that fragment of the *Cintola del Duomo*, the girdle of S. Maria Assunta, of which I have spoken. One then comes to some marvellous crucifixes of a wonderful and strange beauty, and a little thirteenth-century portrait of S. Francis on copper, a true miniature, and then the bulk of the pictures in several rooms. Many of these pictures, as I have said, are of the greatest interest and beauty. Indeed, here in the galleries of this museum one may perhaps best study the beginnings of Tuscan painting. But this is not the place to write of these pictures. I will confine myself to mentioning the loveliest among the many lovely works here: I mean the fragments of an altar-piece, the greater part of which is in the church of S. Caterina upon the high altar there, whither it has been moved from the *Seminario*.<sup>1</sup> These fragments, like the whole altar-piece, are by Simone Martini of Siena, and in their exquisite grace and beauty are among his loveliest works. I will also name the delightful little panel of the Madonna and Child by Gentile da Fabriano.

Coming out of the Museo one seeks at once the Piazza Cavalieri at the end of the Via S. Lorenzo. This is the most beautiful piazza in Pisa and one of the most charming in Italy. One enters it from Via S. Lorenzo by an archway under a palace built to the shape of the piazza, which marks the spot

<sup>1</sup> It seems to have been removed again to the *Seminario*.

where the Tower of Hunger once stood, in which Conte Ugolino Gherardesca, with his sons and nephew, were starved to death by Archbishop Ruggieri degli Ubaldini. Almost opposite, on the left side of the square, is the beautiful palace of the Anziani, the Elders, later the Palazzo dei Cavalieri, built by Vasari, and close by is the marble Palazzo del Consiglio, which also belonged to the knights.

The knights of S. Stephen, to whom the whole piazza belonged, after their foundation by Cosimo I, Grand Duke of Tuscany, whose statue is in front of the beautiful steps of the Palazzo Conventuale, were a religious and military Order whose duty it was to fight the Moorish pirates, convert them to Christianity, and redeem their captives. They fought at Lepanto. There is little to be seen in the church, a few old banners and a bust of S. Lussorio, probably by Donatello.

And now as to the innumerable churches in Pisa. It is impossible in such a book as this to do more than make what amounts to a mere list of them and to name the works of art they contain.

I will begin with S. Francesco, the church of which the convent is the museum. This is a Gothic building of the end of the thirteenth century with a charming campanile. In the choir are frescoes usually given to Taddeo Gaddi, but which Dr. Offner attributes to some Pisan follower of Simone Martini. On the altar to the left is an

altar-piece of S. Francis and his legend, a work of the thirteenth century. In the sacristy are frescoes of the Death and Assumption of the Virgin by Taddeo di Bartolo (1397); and in the cloister the chapter house contains frescoes by Niccolò di Pietro Gerini.

The church of S. Caterina to the north of S. Francesco is being restored, and, when I last saw it, was full of dust. Over the altar on the left wall is the famous painting of S. Thomas in glory (1363), generally given to Traini; but according to Dr. Offner it is not by Traini, but by a painter under the influence of the Sieneese, especially Simone and Ambrogio Lorenzetti. Here, too, is a charming Annunciation in marble by Nino Pisano.

The famous Simone Martini polyptych, parts of which are in the Museo, was lately erected again over the high altar here, but probably to save it from the dust of the builders it has been sent back to the adjoining Seminario. This polyptych is an early work of Simone's, and is worth any trouble to see. Close by in the same room are preserved panels from the legend of S. Dominic, the central panel of which, a full-length figure of S. Dominic holding a lily, is in the Museo, by Francesco Traini.

Close by is the church of S. Torpe where, on the right of the nave, between the first and second altars, is a picture of the Madonna and Child which Dr. Offner attributes to Cecco di Pietro, but it has been repainted. Near by is the convent of

S. Tommaso, where, in the chapel, over the altar on the left is a picture of the Madonna Assunta, which Dr. Offner attributes to Antonio Veneziano.

In Via Torelli, near the Leaning Tower, stands the small church of S. Ranierino. Here, over the altar on the left, is a Crucifix by Giunta Pisano, signed PISANVS. On the left of the high altar is a Coronation of the Blessed Virgin by Spinello and his assistants, and right and left of the high altar two saints of the Pisan school of the late fifteenth century.

In Via S. Cecilia, where it joins Via S. Francesco, stands the church of S. Cecilia, which without, still retains its ancient structure of the twelfth century. Within on the right wall is a Crucifix, the head only still of the dugento. On the left wall is a Madonna and Child, once of the trecento, but altogether repainted; on the right wall is an Ecce Homo by Nino Pisano.

In a small piazza out of Via S. Francesco stands the church of S. Paolo all' Orto, of which the lower part of the façade in marble and stone is an excellent example of Pisan work of an earlier date than the Duomo.

I now turn to S. Croce in Fossabanda where, in a chapel on the right, is a picture of the Madonna and Child with eight angels, signed ALVARO PIREZ DEVORA PINTOV. Alvaro de Pirez di Evoro was a Portuguese painter of the early quattrocento.

In Via S. Marta stands the church of that name. It possesses in the chapel on the right of the

entrance a fine Crucifix with six *storie*, a Pisan work of the thirteenth century, earlier than the work of Giunta Pisano.

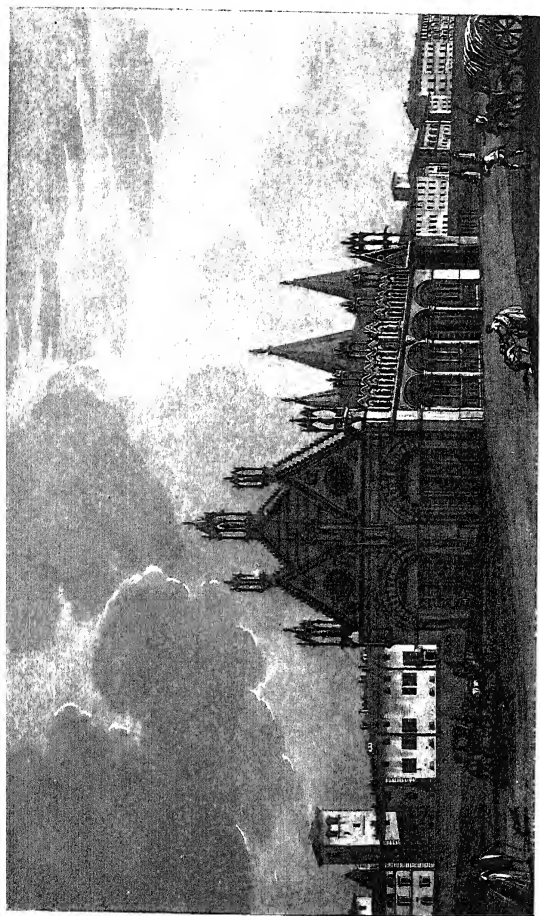
Near the Ponte alla Fortezza, on the Lung' Arno Mediceo, stands the church of S. Matteo, whose ancient remains are worth seeing, though it now contains no works of art.

Returning along the Lung' Arno one may turn into Piazza Carioli to visit the church of S. Pierino. Here on the wall behind the high altar is another of these large ancient Crucifixes in which Pisa is so rich. This is, according to Dr. Offner, by a Pisan contemporary of Giunta.

So one comes to Piazza Garibaldi and the Borgo. Here at the top of the Via del Borgo stands the church of S. Michele. The fine roman-  
esque façade of which is in the manner of the façade of the Cathedral. Within over the second altar on the left is a fourteenth-century Crucifix in wood, and over the second altar on the right a triptych by Taddeo di Bartolo. In the sacristy on either side the altar are two saints, perhaps by Spinello Aretino.

Not far away, in Piazza di S. Frediano, stands the church of that name: within in the first chapel on the left is a much darkened Crucifix of about 1200. The church itself is worth study. Its nave is upheld by ancient columns and close by is the ancient Torre del Campano.

Quite as well worth notice is the church and tower of S. Niccolò in Via S. Maria. Within, in a



*La Madonna della Spina, Pisa*





poor state, is a charming picture of the Madonna and Child painted by some anonymous master, according to Dr. Offner, under Daddesque influence.

Upon the other side of the Arno the chief church is that of very ancient foundation dedicated in honour of S. Paul, S. Paolo a Ripa d'Arno. It is old and only less beautiful than the Cathedral itself, and was indeed used as the Cathedral while that was building and served in some sort, so tradition asserts, as its model. It deserves a visit for its beauty, and there within on the right wall of the nave is a fresco of the Madonna and Child by some follower of Spinello Aretino. On a pillar on the left is a very fine Giottesque fresco of a saint. Over an altar in the left aisle is a Madonna and Child with saints by Turino Vanni, and in the chapel in the left transept is a thirteenth-century Crucifixion of which, unhappily, only the head is unrestored.

Far too thoroughly restored to be any longer of much interest is the little chapel of S. Maria della Spina on Lung' Arno Gambacorti, a Gothic building of white marble. Just behind it in Via S. Antonio is the church of SS. Cosma and Damiano where, over the altar on the left of the high altar, is a small panel of the Madonna and Child of the fourteenth century.

Close by, along Via Alessandro Volta, is the church of S. Maria Maddalena where, in the sacristy, is another fourteenth-century picture of

the Madonna and Child with the Magdalen, the Baptist, and other saints.

From S. Maria Maddalena one follows Via Maggini into Piazza Vittorio Emanuele and then turns into Via Vittorio Emanuele where stands the church of S. Domenico. Here on the left wall is a Crucifixion with the forty martyrs in a landscape, by Benozzo Gozzoli and his assistants. Some of the figures are very much unlike Benozzo, but the two heads close to the Cross seem certainly to be from his hand.

Though it has no pictures everyone should visit the octagonal church of S. Sepolcro, the Tempars church of Pisa. It was built in the twelfth century by Diotisalvi, to whom is attributed the Pisan Baptistery.

Pisa has other sights besides its quiet old churches which should not be missed: the great palaces along the Arno, which is ennobled by their splendid façades, but their backs are quite as interesting if one takes the trouble to wander down the narrow streets which lie behind them.

But after all it is Pisa itself, and not the sights and treasures of her precincts which brings me back to her again and again. Her quietness charms me and her melancholy is well attuned to the mood of the valley, the marshes, and the sea in sight of which she lies brooding on her old renown.

## XV

### THE SEA REACH

AS THE ARNO PASSES OUT OF PISA IT SEEMS TO gather to itself something of the majestic beauty of that city so strangely quiet; and more silently, more slowly, more nobly than ever before in all its course, to pass across the low and empty sea plain to the sea. It is here for the first time that it appears to us of the north as a true river filling its banks and slowly sweeping, as to music, seaward. Upon the north lie the beautiful pinewoods of the royal estate of S. Rossore, to the south the marsh stretches away to the hills beyond Livorno, above which Montenero lies, the first sanctuary of the Maremma, on the verge of that half-abandoned country across which, from city to city, from hill-top to hill-top, Volterra gazes and has gazed all day long for how many thousand years! An absolute and unbroken silence has fallen upon this last reach of the river and involved it in a certain sadness. There is little to see.

The royal estate of S. Rossore is not without interest it is true, and not only on account of the herd of camels which labour there; the place itself is of very ancient origin and derives its title from an old monastery of Benedictines founded in 1084 by the Archbishops of Pisa, and dedicated in

honour of S. Rossore or S. Lussorio, for such is the true name of the saint. But the monastery passed away, the monks departed, and the place presently became a vast park and farm of the grand dukes. It was Grand Duke Ferdinand II who, in 1622, first introduced camels here into Tuscany, and the small herd thus established was added to in 1663 when General Arighetti took a number from the Turks near Vienna, and again in 1700 and 1738. But it was the founder of the Lorraine dynasty, Francis II, who may truly be said seriously to have established camels at S. Rossore. At any rate, he began to breed them there and with some success, so that before the end of the eighteenth century there were not less than one hundred and ninety-six of them at work here, and there still remain, it seems, about one hundred and fifty. They are chiefly used for carrying the wood grown in the *pineta* about the estate and are housed in two huge sheds, one for the males and one for the females.

But there is a more interesting spectacle to be had upon the sea-reach of Arno than the royal estate of S. Rossore and its camels. This is the very ancient church upon the left bank of the river, some way from the stream, S. Piero a Grado. It is an ancient sanctuary, a basilica of three aisles ending in apses, and the Archbishop of Pisa is its parish priest with the title of Priore Proposto. How came so venerable a temple in such loneliness?

According to the testimony of Strabo, in his

time the city of Pisa was but twenty *stadia* from the *lido*, the seashore. There can be little doubt, as I shall try to show, that in those days and for centuries after, the Arno formed here at its mouth a vast delta and that the name of this, Ad Gradus, very well describes it.

Now it is said, and the tradition still endures, that the Prince of the Apostles, S. Pietro, on his way from Antioch to Rome, blown out of his course, arrived upon these shores and landed here upon Tuscan soil, and that at the place where he landed he erected the first altar in all this country and there said Mass. The tradition is ancient and the church is there to reinforce it. In one of his sermons, written about the middle of the thirteenth century, the Archbishop of Pisa, Frederigo Visconti, recounts that the first church of S. Piero a Grado was built by S. Peter himself, assisted by his disciples, and that it was consecrated by his fourth successor in the papacy, S. Clement I. That building or oratory was of wood and was presently destroyed by time, tempest, and war. Then the Pisans built a finer church of stone in the same place, and it is largely the material they then used that we see in the present very ancient building, which dates from the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the fifth-century apse, however, remaining. The campanile would seem to date from the tenth century.

The antique and simple beauty of the church, the huge basilica abandoned in the marshes like

a ship, gives to the whole sea reach of the Arno its character. It towers up there the one definite thing in the vague distance of the sea and the sea marsh. And if without and from a distance the church is wonderful, within it is not less astonishing. Upheld by antique marble columns of marvellous beauty, bound now with iron, its walls covered with fading frescoes, work later than Giunta Pisano, the last splendour of a splendid school, it is as it were the true shrine of all this country. There we see the portraits of the Popes from S. Peter to John XIV (985) and scenes from the lives of SS. Peter and Paul by an anonymous Pisan-Lucchese master of about 1300, according to Mr. Perkins. Dr. Offner assigns them to Deodato Orlandi.

One goes on by the road beside the river to the Marina di Pisa, a modern watering-place across the half-drained and lonely marsh, the old Bocca d'Arno, to the sea. Nothing could well be lovelier than the mouth of the river, where Arno is lost in the waves, and the wind comes over the tall grass and all the world is fresh and green and lost in flowers. One forgets there the lonely marshes in the colour of the sea and the gladness and the beauty of the great hills far away, in the sweetness of the river meadows and the gold of the sun; but one cannot forget that marvellous and half-abandoned church stranded there between the city and the shore, and now without meaning. What in all this changed and changing world does

it stand for, what does it represent? Was there once a city gathered round about it? Was it there stood the Roman port of Pisa and the mediaeval Porto Pisano that was so famous throughout the world and now is nothing? In truth it is impossible to answer. Perhaps where S. Piero a Grado stands of old the Roman port welcomed the shipping of the midland sea; only this we know, that not there stood the famous Porto Pisano that the Genoese half destroyed after Meloria in 1284, and finally in 1362 when they stole away the great chains that guarded the entrance to return them when United Italy was created in 1860, so that they are now to be seen in the Campo Santo there at Pisa, the most famous of all its famous relics.

I have said that Strabo speaks of the Arno as threefold, and we may gather from what he says that there was a vast delta at its mouth. It may be that the present course of the river runs along the central of its three ancient beds, and that the most ancient port stood there where S. Piero a Grado still lies beside the way. It is certain, however, that the mediaeval Porto Pisano stood elsewhere, and it is perhaps unlikely that this was not also the Roman port.

As you come down the Val d'Arno Pisano between Pontedera and Pisa, as it happens at Fornacci you may still see the canal known as the Arnaccio lead the river on its way across the plain to the sea at Foce Calambrona, just outside Leghorn to the north. This canal, excavated and furnished



with towers by the Pisans in 1176, would seem to mark the course of the most southern arm of the threefold Arno, of which Strabo speaks, and it was at its mouth that the Porto Pisano stood.

This *porto*, as we thus see, formed no part of the city of Pisa; it was itself a fortified town situated on the sea coast, defended by seven towers, three of which in some sort remain, the Marzocco, of white marble, still perfect and now used as a coastguard station, built by the Florentines in 1423, and the ruins of two others, the Maltarchiata and the Magnate, far more ancient. It was this town, the sea entrance to which was defended by the chains stolen by the Genoese in 1262, which we now see in the Pisan Campo Santo, not Pisa.

The Porto Pisano of the Romans, whether it stood here where the mediaeval port certainly lay, or whether it is to be looked for farther north at Bocca d'Arno or S. Piero a Grado, was an important place. Many ships sailed thence even in the years of Hannibal for the conquest of Corsica and Sardinia. As long ago as 225 B.C. Caius Atilius Regulus, at the head of his legions, disembarked here to join Aemilius Papus and to break the Gauls at Telamon. All through the Imperial years it maintained its importance, and Claudian tells us that it was the most important harbour of Etruria. What befell it in the Dark Ages we are ignorant. If it occupied the same site as the mediaeval Porto Pisano, it would seem

that the branch of the Arno, at whose mouth it stood, had largely silted up, at any rate in 1147 the Pisans excavated the Arnaccio, having, a generation before, erected two towers at its mouth to guard their port and a third on the island of Meloria.

I cannot here speak of the fame of the great town which is named in every page of the Pisan chronicles and was the main source of the wealth of the city. It must be enough to add here that the Florentines, when they took Pisa in the beginning of the fifteenth century, took the city chiefly for the sake of the *porto* and immediately built a great marble tower to guard it, the Marzocco, which still stands. But in course of time the port silted up, and by the seventeenth century was abandoned. That this would be necessary had long been foreseen. Already, before the close of the sixteenth century, the grand dukes had begun to build a great port at Livorno, then a swampy village, and to establish this firmly they erected it into a free port and a refuge for the exiles of all nations, more especially for the Jews, the Moors, the Huguenots, and Flemings. Under Ferdinand I the Jews were more than ever encouraged, a charter was granted them, and thus was the new port successfully established, the English exiles having no small part in its success, more especially Sir Robert Dudley, Duke of Northumberland, born in 1572, the son of the Earl of Leicester by his second wife. Ferdinand II established him in Leghorn, where he at once began to build ships

for his master. There he launched the San Giovanni, "the terror of the Turks," and it was largely thanks to his genius that Leghorn became the great commercial port it was and, in some sort, remains. He persuaded the Grand Duke to build fortifications, to declare it a free port, and to allow an English "factory" to be built. The draining of the marshes between Leghorn and Pisa was also suggested by him.

Leghorn to-day stands far away from Arno, without a thought or memory of the river it was built to serve. Not there, but amid the flowers of Bocca d'Arno, in the joyful silence of sun and wind and the delight of the lovely shore beyond San Rossore, within sight of S. Piero a Grado, Arno now finds the sea far from the life of the modern world in a beauty and peace that dawn and evening continually renew, and that we, in our hurried day, have come to love and to seek. It is so we would have Arno, famous and beloved, die at last in the arms of the sea, not amid the clamour of hammers, the sound of iron upon iron, the confusion of an industry, but in the beauty and peace of that Tuscany which is still so blessed that in herself she is a benediction.

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